# 半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 7

## CENTER OF THE WORLD

*By* KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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*Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,*
*Striving to Grow into a Rising River.*

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DARK HORSE MANGA™

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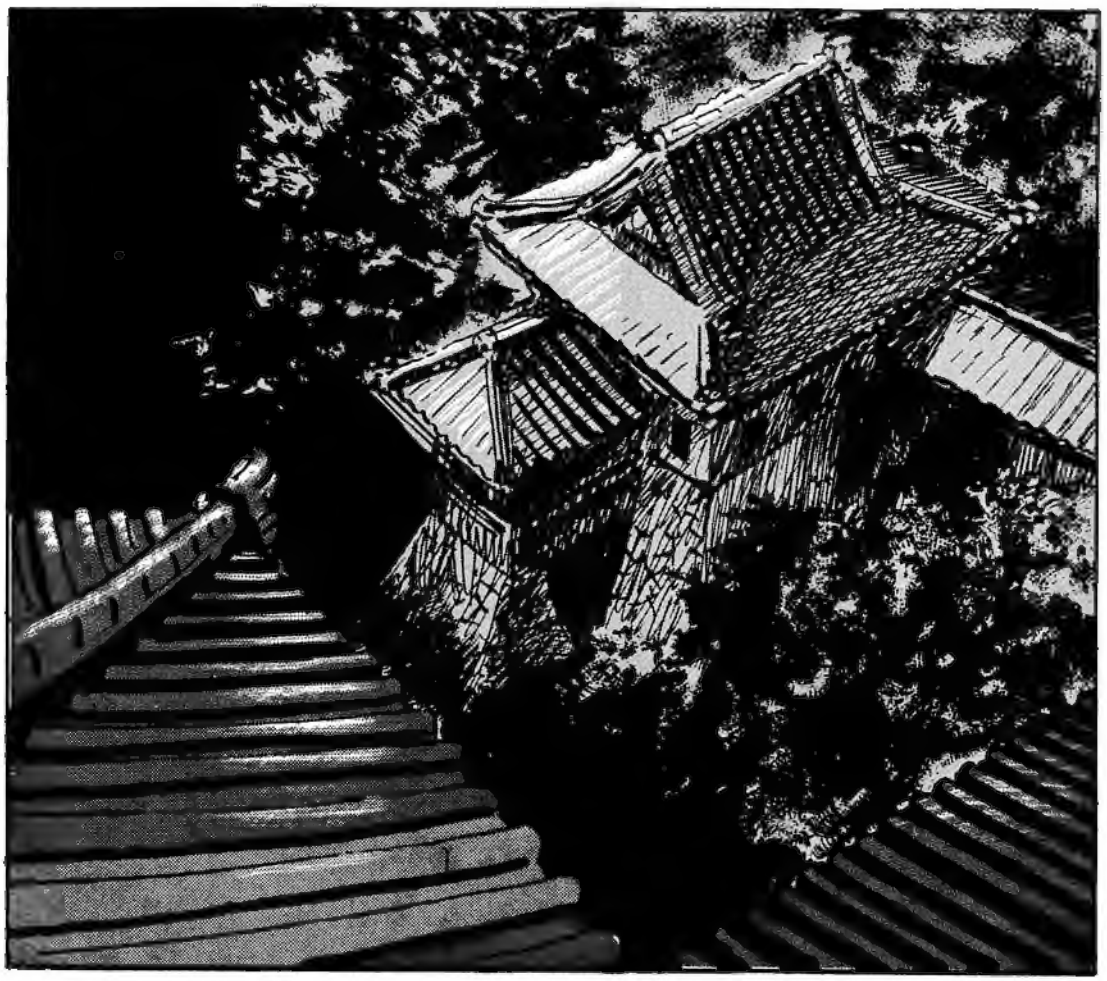
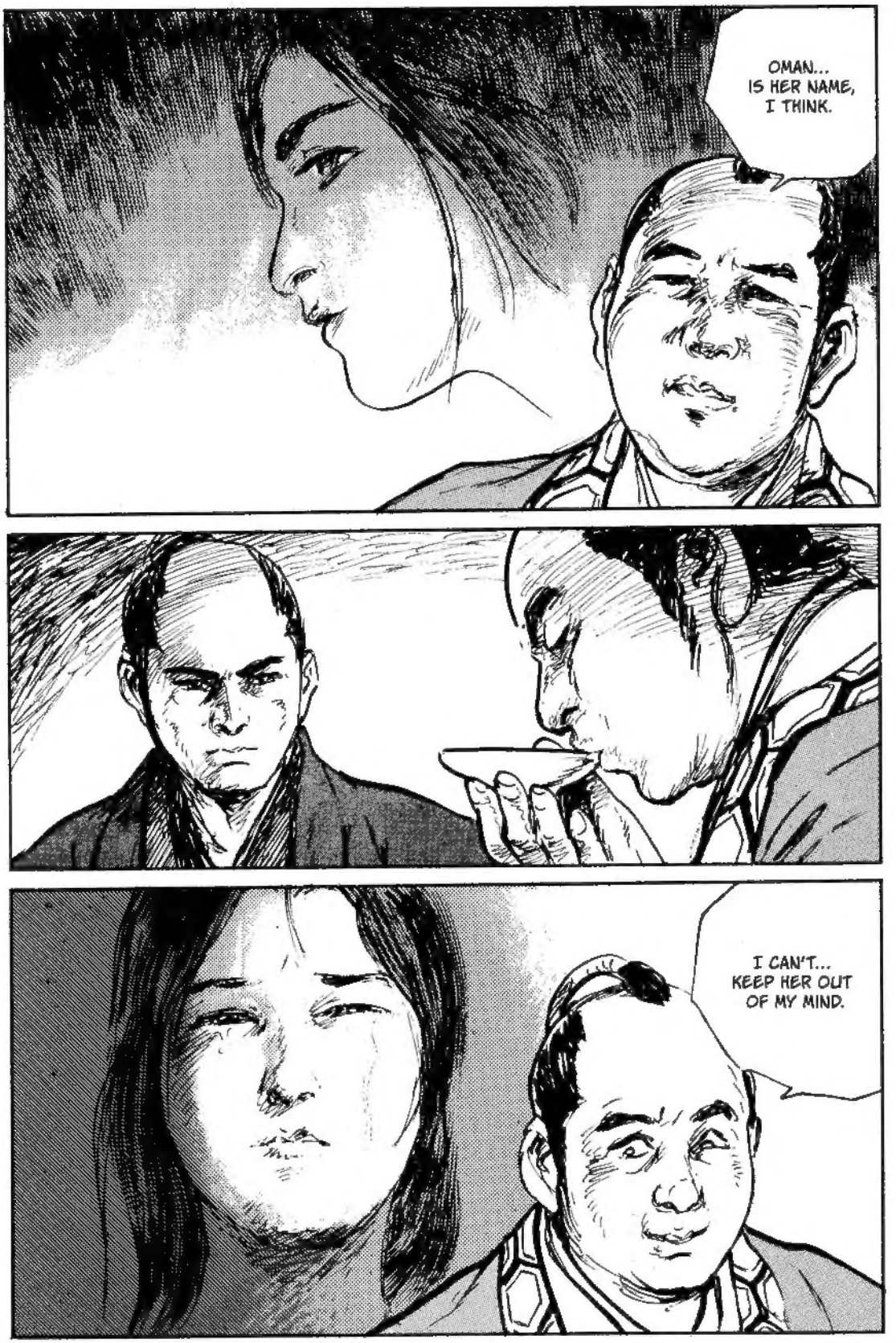
# Chapter On Shogyō Mujō

## No. 3: Oman



YES.
IT'S FREEZING.
YES?
ER...
ER... WHAT?
ER... YOU KNOW.

...
...
...
I WONDER HOW SHE'S DOING.


OMAN...
IS HER NAME,
I THINK.
I CAN'T...
KEEP HER OUT
OF MY MIND.

ON COLD NIGHTS, WE DRINK *SAKE*. IT WARMS THE BODY. BUT SUCH WARMTH WON'T WARM THE HEART.
AND THE FROZEN HEART IS LIT ON FIRE.
HOW DEMANDING A MAN'S HEART IS. NOW THAT THE UPRISING IS SUBDUED AND WE ENTER THE NEW YEAR IN PEACE, A GREEDY DESIRE BUBBLES UP.

SHLUP
I THOUGHT I'D NEVER BE HAPPIER IF I COULD ONLY SLEEP IN PEACE, BUT NOW I WANT A WARM BODY TO LIE BESIDE ME.
HOLD IT!
H... HOLD.
IF YOU FIND OMAN-*DONO* PLEASING, LET ME SUMMON HER AT ONCE...
OMAN'S FATHER GAVE ME ADVICE BY ILLUMINATING WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN, THEN HE DIED.
IT... IT WON'T DO... THINK ABOUT IT.

UHH
MUMBLE MUMBLE
HOW CAN I CALL HIS DAUGHTER OVER AND TOUCH HER WHEN NOT EVEN FORTY-NINE DAYS HAVE PASSED SINCE...
FOR OMAN-*DONO*, IT WOULD BE THE GREATEST HONOR TO BE SUMMONED AND LOVED BY HER MASTER.
WHY DO YOU SAY SO?
IT WOULD BE PROBLEMATIC IN MANY WAYS...
I WANT HER... BUT NOT LIKE THAT... BUT AS A MAN... IN A NATURAL WAY... I MEAN... I WANT OMAN... URM... ER...
NO, NO. THAT'S JUST SUPERFICIAL FORMALITY TALKING.
I HAVE NO DOUBT HER FATHER WILL BE PLEASED IN HADES...

OH...
THAT'S ALL.
URM, I MEAN, I WANT HER TO LIKE ME TOO.

YEAH. SINCE THEN... I'VE BEEN VISUALIZING HER IMAGE IN MY MIND... ER... URM...
MILORD, IT SEEMS YOU ARE VERY MUCH CAPTIVATED BY OMAN-*DONO*.
SLURP

HOW CAN I FORGET?
AFTER ALL, SHE THREW HERSELF DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF MY ARROW.

BUT THEN, I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER I FORCED HER INTO IT. WHAT IF I HURT HER FEELINGS. IT WOULD BE CRUEL, AND I'D FEEL BAD ABOUT THAT TOO...
I KNOW I'M HER LORD AND THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH CALLING FOR HER.

HUH?
HEY, THAT'S IT!
AND YET...

YES, SIR!
DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!
YOU'RE RIGHT THERE! YOU'RE BETWEEN ME AND OMAN!
UNDERSTOOD.
THAT'S RIGHT.
YOU WANT IT TO HAPPEN... NATURALLY.
YEAH.
SOMEHOW, AND WITHOUT HURTING OMAN-*DONO*'S FEELINGS.
DON'T SAY IT LIKE IT'S NOT MUCH OF A TASK. YOU'RE NOT TO USE *SHINOBI*'S TECHNIQUES.

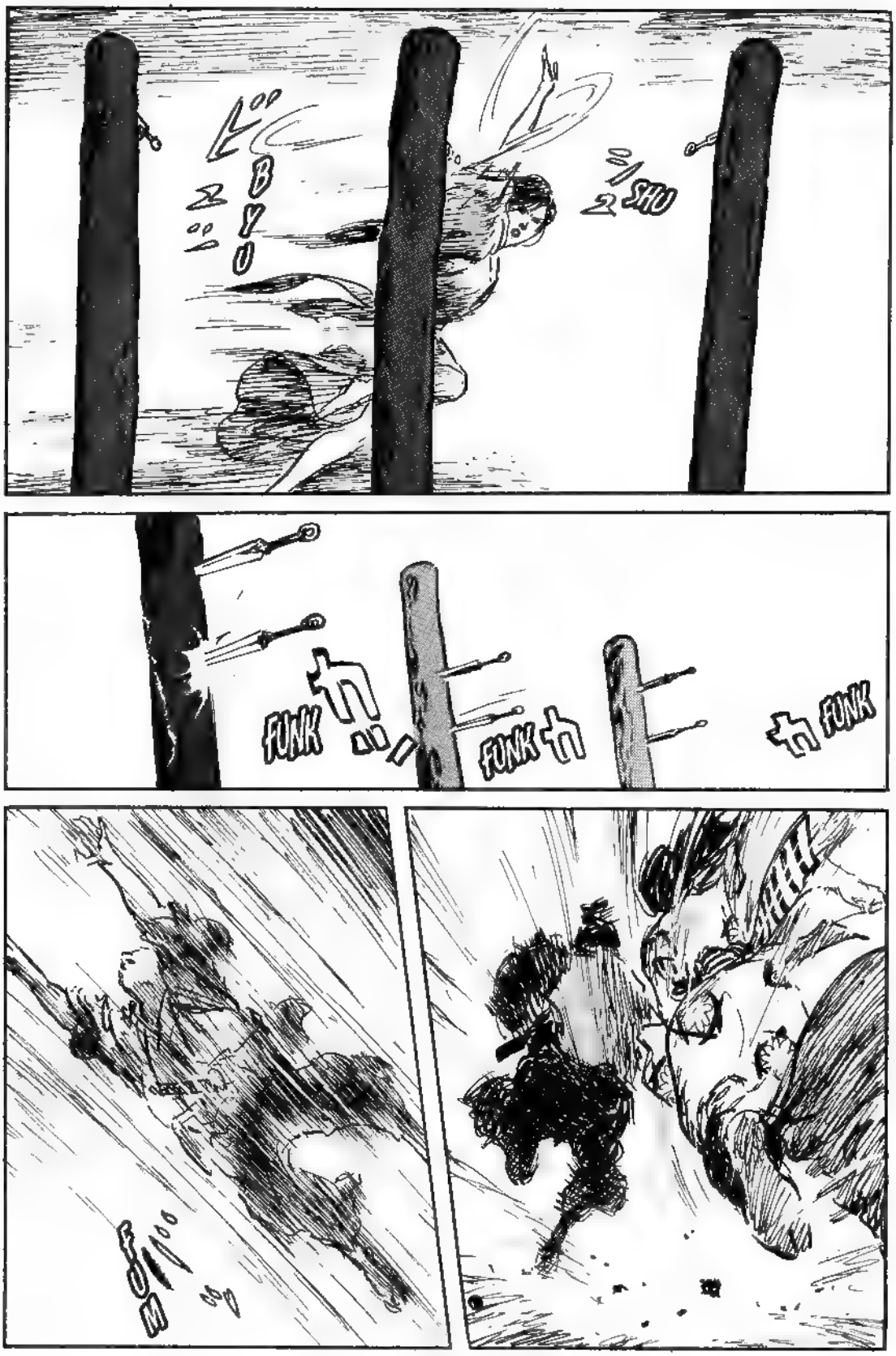
I HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK ...
AHAHAHA
HM?
A WARM BATH IS PREPARED FOR YOU.

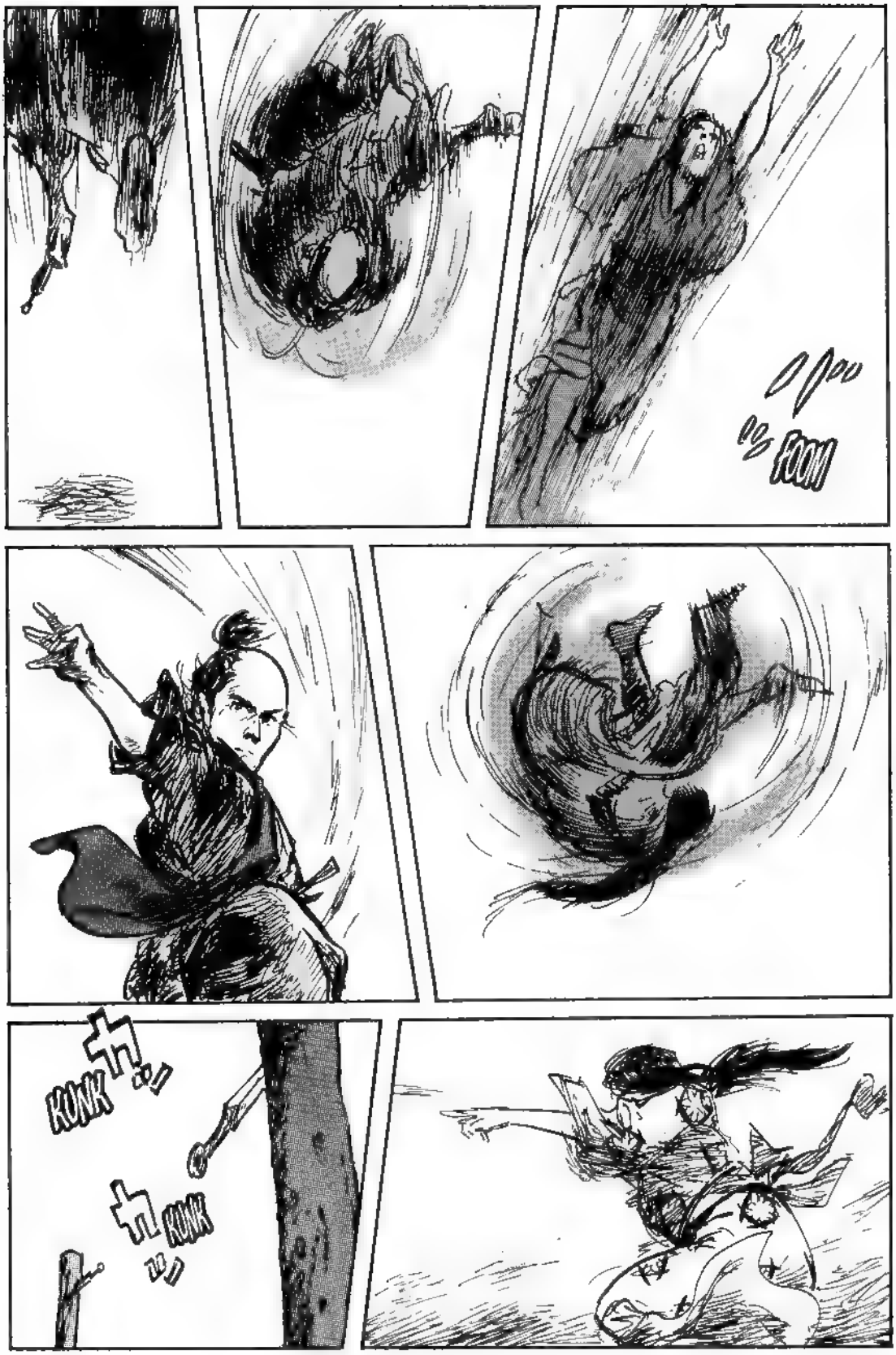
VERY THOUGHTFUL.
VERY GOOD.
TAKING A WARM BATH IN THE MORNING IS PERFECT AT A TIME LIKE THIS.
YEAH, THAT'S GOOD.
BUT THAT HANZŌ! HE KEPT ON POURING ME SAKE FOR TOO LONG.
AHHH
PLUSHH
ARRGH. MY HEAD IS HEAVY.

AHHH!! HMM. IT FEELS GOOD.
HAAA
PLISH
PLISH
STARTING TODAY, I AM TO SERVE AS YOUR MAIDSERVANT.
YOU ARE...?!
HM?

LIFT...
LIFT YOUR
FACE.
WOW!
IT'S...
IT'S YOU,
OMAN!

HUFF
HUFF
HUFF


BYU
SHU
FUNK
FUNK
FUNK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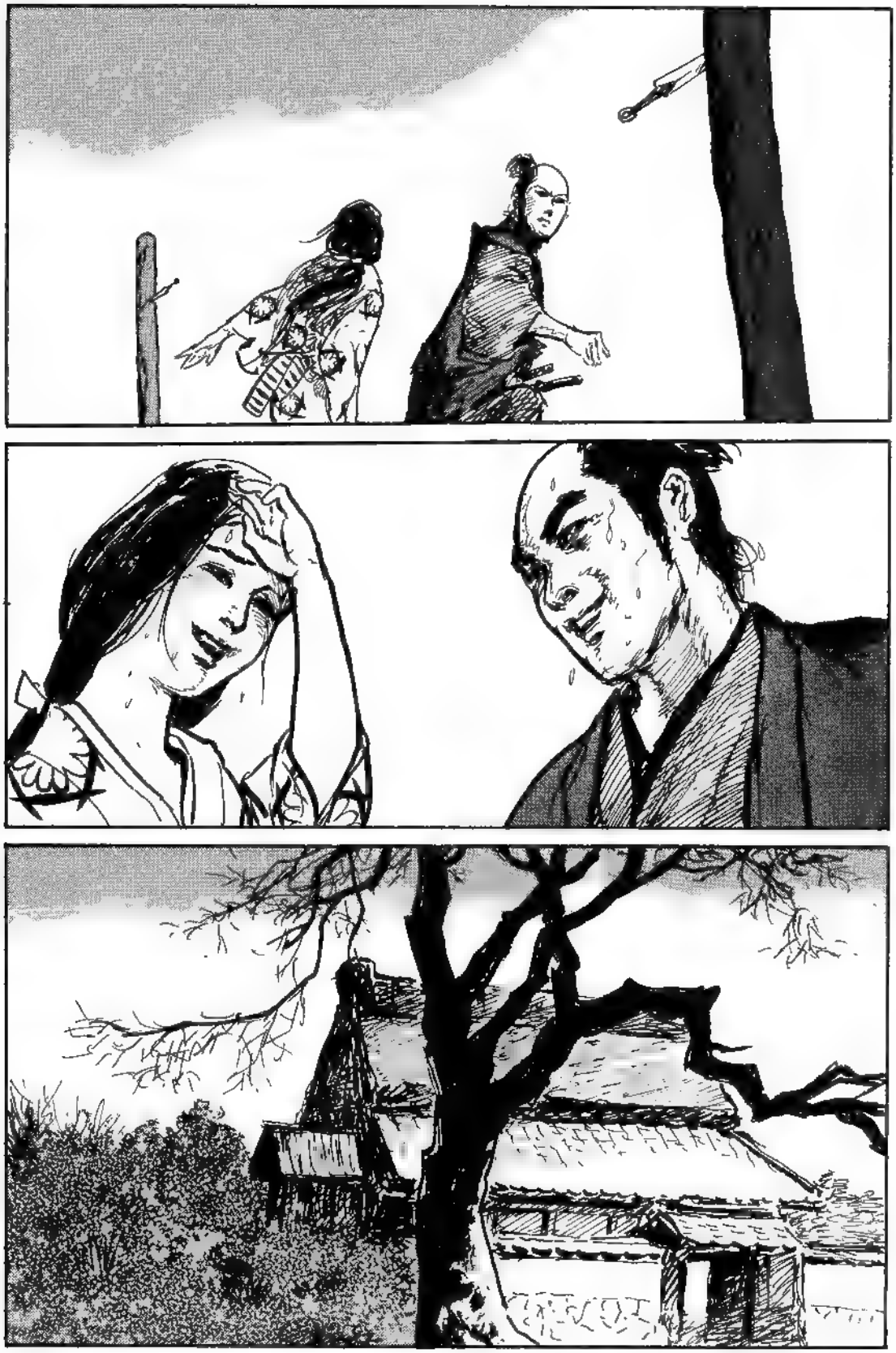


IT'S ABOUT TIME... I THINK.

?!
HE IS FUNDA-MENTALLY DIFFERENT.
IT'S ABOUT MILORD.
WHAT... ABOUT?
COMPARING WHAT?
COMPARED TO THE OTHER WARLORDS, I MEAN.
...
...
THE WAY HE REGARDS WOMEN, AND ALSO THE WAY HE TREATS THEM.

ONCE A CASTLE FALLS AFTER AN ATTACK, WARLORDS TURN INTO BEASTS AND RAPE THE WOMEN INSIDE. THEY KILL ANYONE WHO RESISTS.
USING BRUTE STRENGTH. DEFYING ANY PROTEST.
FORCIBLY RAPING AND SUBDUING WOMEN, THAT'S NORMAL FOR SOMEONE IN HIS POSITION.
EXCEPT OUR LORD. HE IS DIFFERENT. EVEN WHEN HE FINDS A WOMAN DESIRABLE, HE WON'T FORCE ANYTHING.
IF THERE IS A WOMAN THEY FIND ATTRACTIVE IN THEIR OWN TERRITORY, THEY'D BE EVEN LESS HESITANT ABOUT SUMMONING HER AND DOING WHATEVER THEY PLEASED.
HE'S CONSIDERATE OF HER. AND HE WANTS HER TO LIKE HIM TOO.
ALL WARLORDS ARE THAT WAY.

THAT'S RIGHT. I REALLY LIKE HIM FOR BEING THAT WAY.
IS IT ABOUT... OMAN-*DONO*?
WHAT HAPPENED... THIS TIME?
I'M CONVINCED OF IT, AFTER WHAT HAPPENED THIS TIME.
I TOO HAD A WOMAN...
WITH YOU, SOMEHOW, BEFORE I KNEW IT, WE WERE HAVING SEX...
ER... NO.
I MEAN, AS FAR AS I REMEMBER... I'VE NEVER BEEN AS CONSIDERATE TO A WOMAN AS HE IS...

OW.
HA HA HA HA HA.
I BET YOU WERE!
WHA... WHAT'RE... AWW.
I BET YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT A WOMAN FROM YOUR PAST.
OUCH!
WHAT HAPPENED LONG AGO CAN'T BE CHANGED. BUT IF YOU EVER MAKE LOVE TO ANYONE BUT ME...

OWWW... CHH.
I'LL CUT THIS OFF!
AHHH
UH...
WHY WOULD I? WHY WOULD I EVER TOUCH A WOMAN OTHER THAN YOU?!

AHHH
KARA
KARA
KARA
KARA

ガシャ
GASHA
ZAHA
AHHHH
ZAHA

IT WAS HATTORI-SAMA.
WHO ORDERED YOU HERE...
OH... ALL RIGHT.
SO... SO.... HAVE YOU HELPED... YOUR FATHER... BATHE?
YE...ER... NO. I WIPED HIS HANDS AND FEET... THOUGH...
OH... OKAY.

D... DON'T YOU HATE THIS? I MIGHT BE YOUR LORD, BUT YOU KNOW, YOU HAVE TO LOOK AT A MAN'S NAKED BODY... AND TOUCH IT TOO.
ER... YOU'RE DOING FINE.
H... HOW... AM I... SUPPOSED TO WASH YOU?
OH... NO...
EEK!
SHOULD... SHOULD I... I MEAN... WOULD IT BE BETTER IF... IF I'M NAKED TOO?

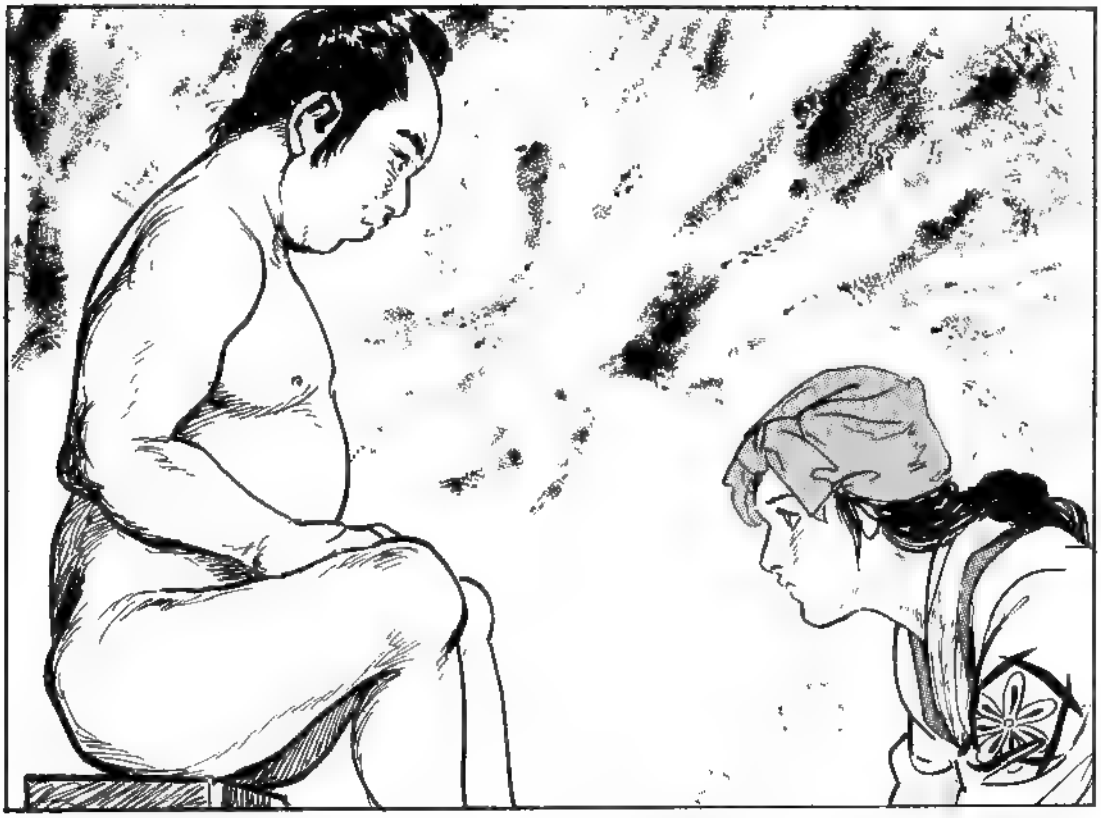
WHY?
WHY IS THAT?!
P... PLEASE
PARDON ME!
WHY DO YOU ASK THAT?
WOULD IT BE BETTER
IF YOU'RE NAKED?
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

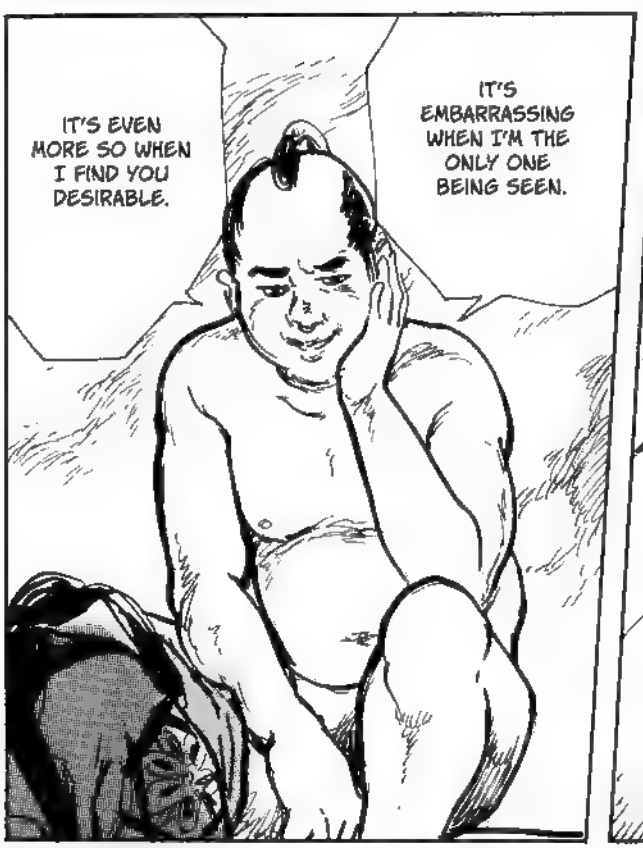
THEN WHY?!
N... NO... HE NEVER... SAID ANY...
DID HANZŌ SAY ANYTHING TO YOU?! DID HE TELL YOU TO GET NAKED AND WASH MY BODY?
I'M NOT ANGRY!
WHAT MISUNDER-STANDING?
IT'S MY MISUNDERSTANDING! PLEASE PARDON ME.
IT... IT'S...

I FELT LIKE I WAS GOING TO HEAVEN... I MEAN, I FELT LIKE I WAS DREAMING...
WH... WHEN HATTORI-SAMA CALLED ME IN... AND TOLD ME TO SERVE AT THE BATHING CHAMBER...
I... I AM SOMEONE... WHO TRIED TO OFFER MY LIFE TO YOU, MILORD...
Y... YES. BUT... EVER SINCE... I COULD NOT... FORGET YOUR KINDNESS, MILORD...
BUT YOU DID THAT FOR YOUR FATHER!
SO... SO WHEN I WAS SUMMONED... MILORD, I... I THOUGHT... YOU ALSO FELT...

I... I THOUGHT... YOU ALSO TOOK NOTICE OF ME... SOMEHOW...
I'M NOT ANGRY, SO TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT.
IF YOU STOP BEFORE YOU FINISH, I'LL HAVE TO GUESS THE REST.
EVEN THOUGH I AM TO BE AT YOUR SIDE... AND TO SERVE YOU AS YOU BATHE... I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO...
THAT... WAS MY MISUNDER-STANDING...

I WASN'T SO CLEAR ABOUT THAT....
DID YOU THINK I'D MAKE LOVE TO YOU IN HERE?
YES!
THAT'S WHY YOU ASKED IF YOU SHOULD BE NAKED?
I QUESTIONED YOU SHARPLY BECAUSE I THOUGHT YOU WERE TRYING TO FLATTER ME OR SOMETHING.




IT'S EVEN MORE SO WHEN I FIND YOU DESIRABLE.
IT'S EMBARRASSING WHEN I'M THE ONLY ONE BEING SEEN.

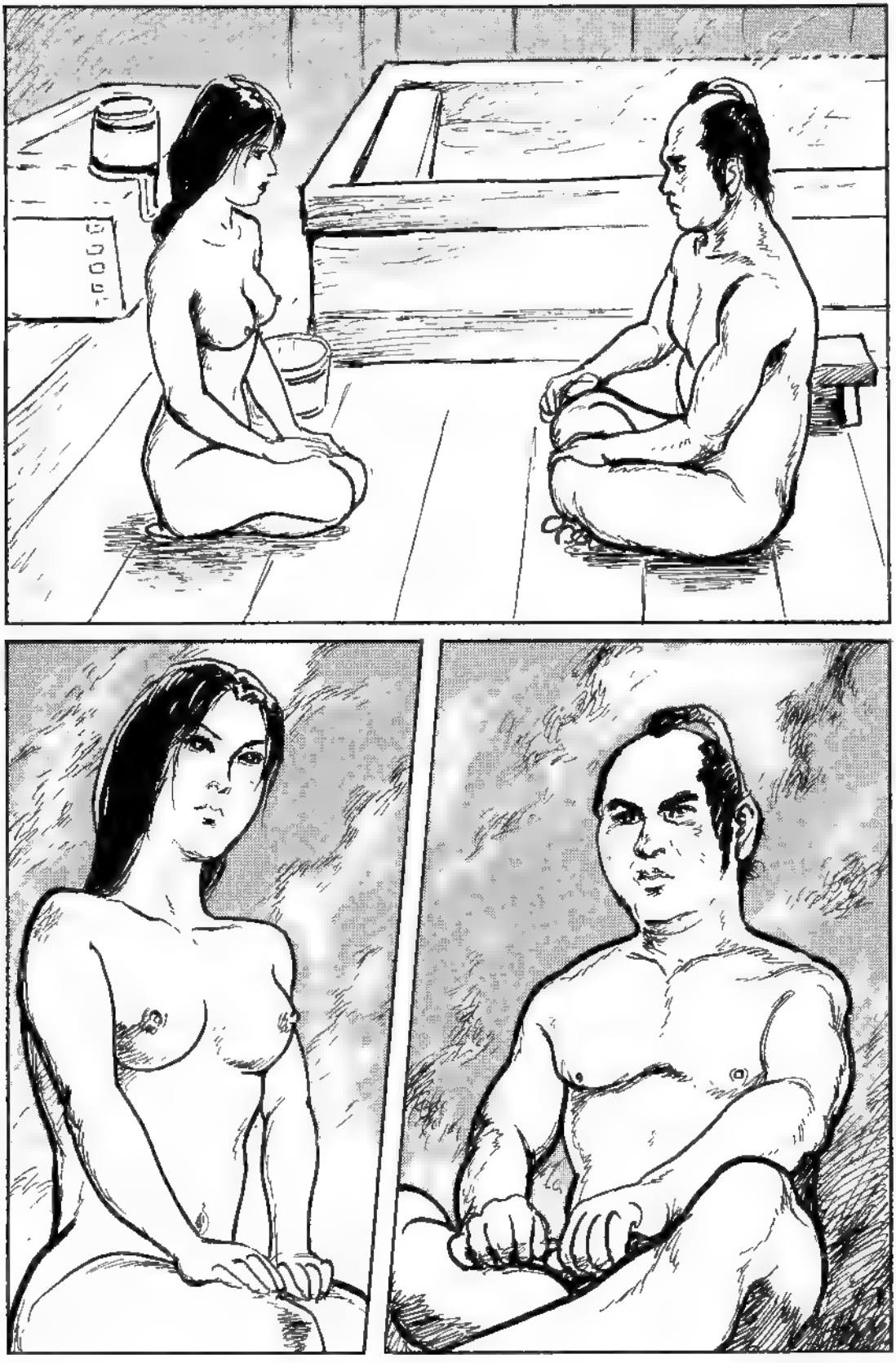
YES!
HOW ABOUT BEING LOOKED AT AS YOU LOOK?
I'D LIKE TO.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO, IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.

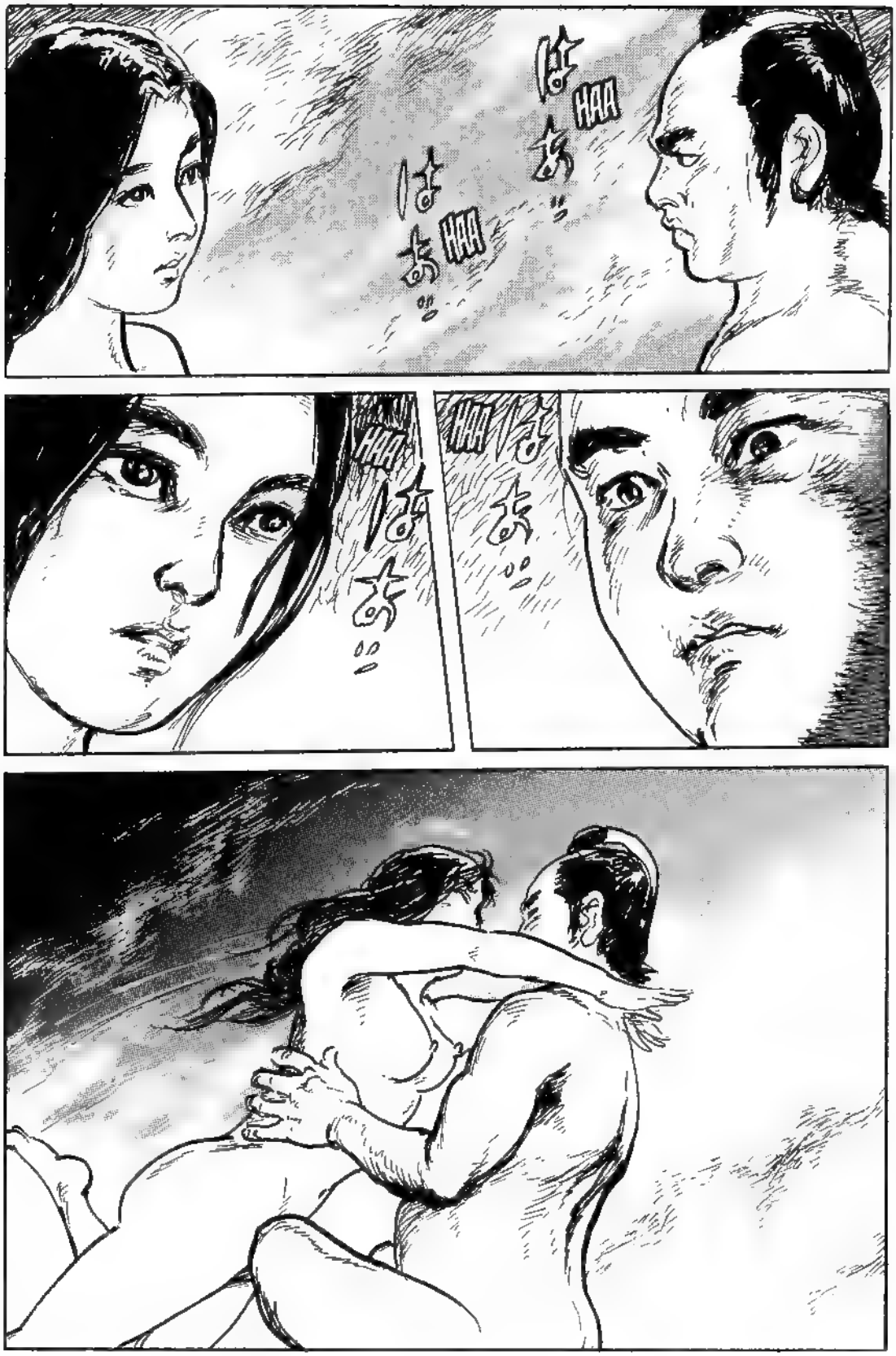
IT'S MY TURN TO LOOK.

UNLESS YOU STAND UP, I CAN'T SEE.

DON'T LOOK AWAY. JUST KEEP LOOKING.

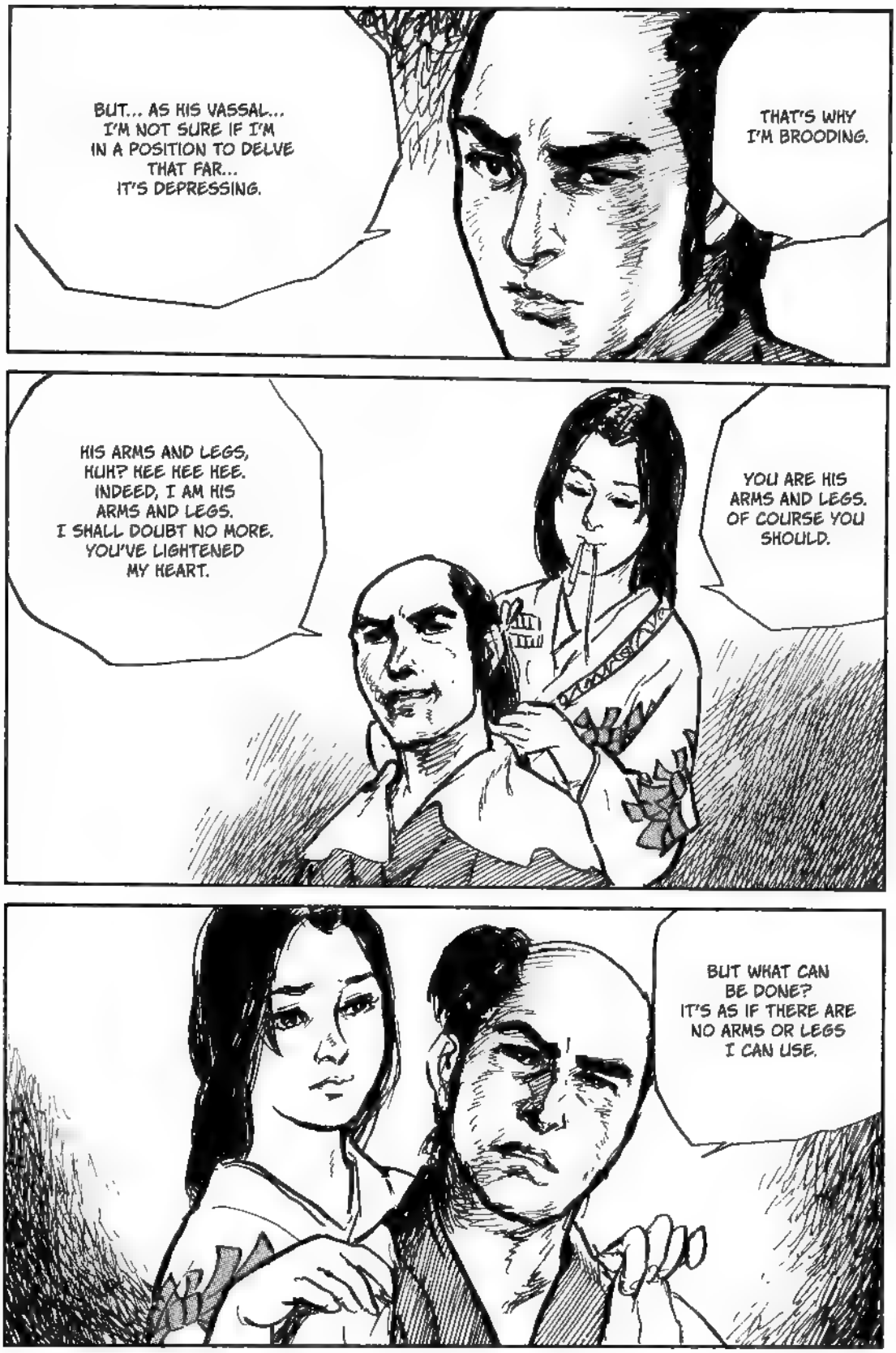
BESIDES... AS WE LOOK AT EACH OTHER, I FEEL ALL EDGES DISAPPEAR. THE CLASS DIFFERENCE VANISHES, AND WE SIMPLY BECOME A MAN AND A WOMAN.
...HOW WONDERFUL IT FEELS TO BE LOOKED AT.
I DIDN'T KNOW...
YOU'RE NOT TREMBLING ANYMORE. YOU'RE NOT EMBARRASSED ANYMORE, ARE YOU?
LOOKING AT AND BEING LOOKED AT. THAT'S A GOOD THING.




HAA
HAA
HAA
HAA

UNDER THE
SAME ROOF...
IT WILL EVENTUALLY
REACH HER EARS.

ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT MILADY?
UH-HUH.
KNOWING HER FIERY NATURE, IT WILL BECOME A BIG PROBLEM UNLESS WE HANDLE IT RIGHT.
I'M SURE SHE'LL VISIT HIM TO CONFIRM.
UNLESS SOMETHING IS DONE, MISFORTUNE MAY BEFALL UPON OMAN-*DONO*, I'M SURE.
SINCE... MILORD CAN'T STAND UP TO MILADY FOR THE LIFE OF HIM...
IT'S TROUBLE-SOME.


BUT... AS HIS VASSAL... I'M NOT SURE IF I'M IN A POSITION TO DELVE THAT FAR... IT'S DEPRESSING.
THAT'S WHY I'M BROODING.
HIS ARMS AND LEGS, HUH? HEE HEE HEE. INDEED, I AM HIS ARMS AND LEGS. I SHALL DOUBT NO MORE. YOU'VE LIGHTENED MY HEART.
YOU ARE HIS ARMS AND LEGS. OF COURSE YOU SHOULD.
BUT WHAT CAN BE DONE? IT'S AS IF THERE ARE NO ARMS OR LEGS I CAN USE.

UH.

AWW!

IT MAY HURT...
A LITTLE.
AHAHA

AUH!
AHHH!
AW...
AWW...
AW!
AHHH!
Y...
YES.
BEAR...
IT.

WHAT'S FUNNY?!
THE HAIR.
THAT'S IT!!

ズイ SKUNCH
?!
I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR, BUT WILL YOU LEAN YOUR FACE CLOSER TO THE HIBACHI?
WHAT'S THIS FOR?

WHA... WHAT NONSENSE!
PLEASE INHALE THROUGH YOUR NOSE AS I BLOW THE CHARCOAL POWDER UP.
WHOA!
HUUU
WHAT?!
PLEASE BEAR IT, MILORD. THIS HELPS GROW HAIR IN THE NOSTRILS.

HMMM.
MAY I WHISPER?
BUT WILL IT WORK...?!
UR...
HUUU
THIS IS FOR OMAN-DONO!! SO PLEASE PUT UP WITH IT.

MILADY IS QUITE FASTIDIOUS, SO I WOULD SAY YES.
BUT, HANZŌ, WILL SHE NOTICE SOMETHING SO TRIVIAL--
FOR THE SAKE OF--
I'M NOT TO SEE MY WIFE, RIGHT?
ABOUT FIVE DAYS, I THINK. UNTIL THEN--
YOU'VE GOT A POINT THERE. SO HOW LONG WILL IT BE BEFORE THE HAIR GROWS OUT?
INDEED.
OMAN. I KNOW.

STOMP
STOMP
STOMP

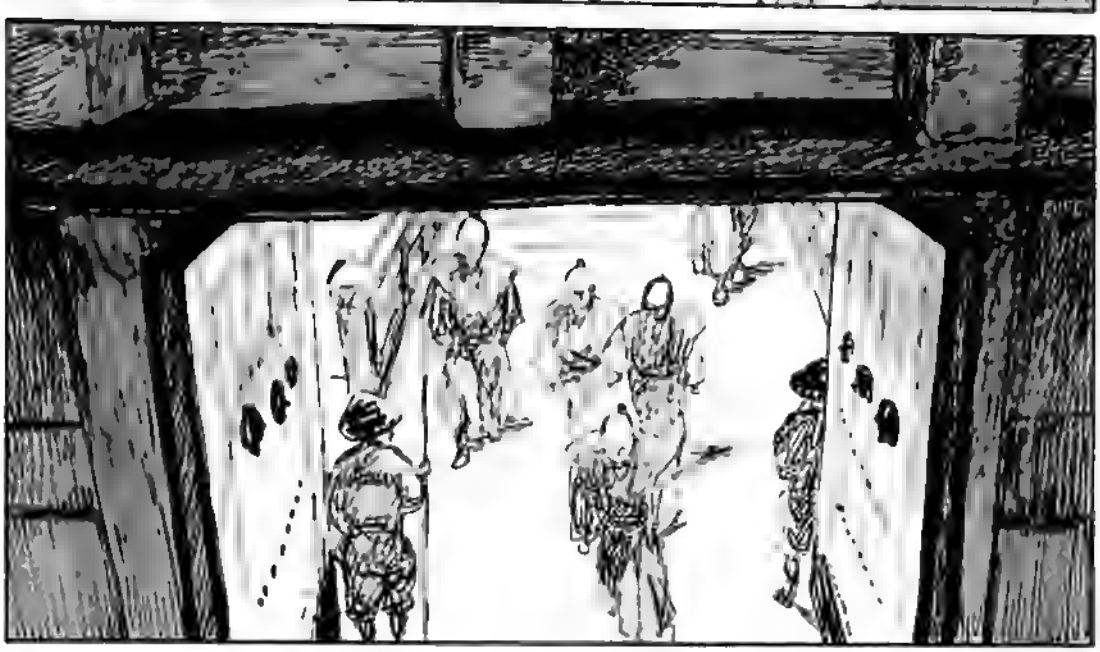
...TRUE...?
I HEAR YOU'VE TAKEN A MISTRESS. IS IT...

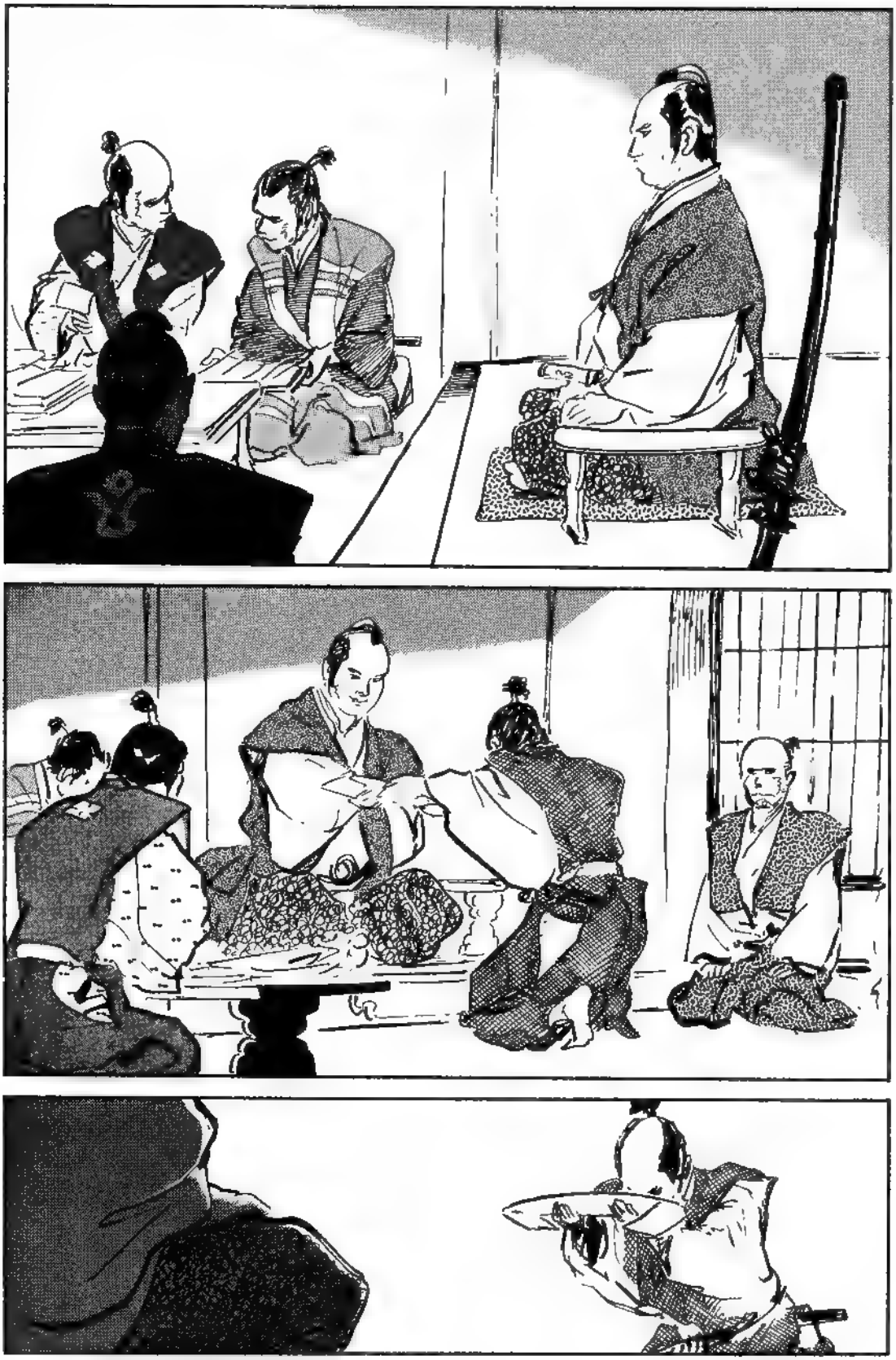
HUH?!
AH. HMM. YOU THINK SO?
PLEASE TRIM THE HAIR IN YOUR NOSE. YOU LOOK FILTHY.
DARLING.

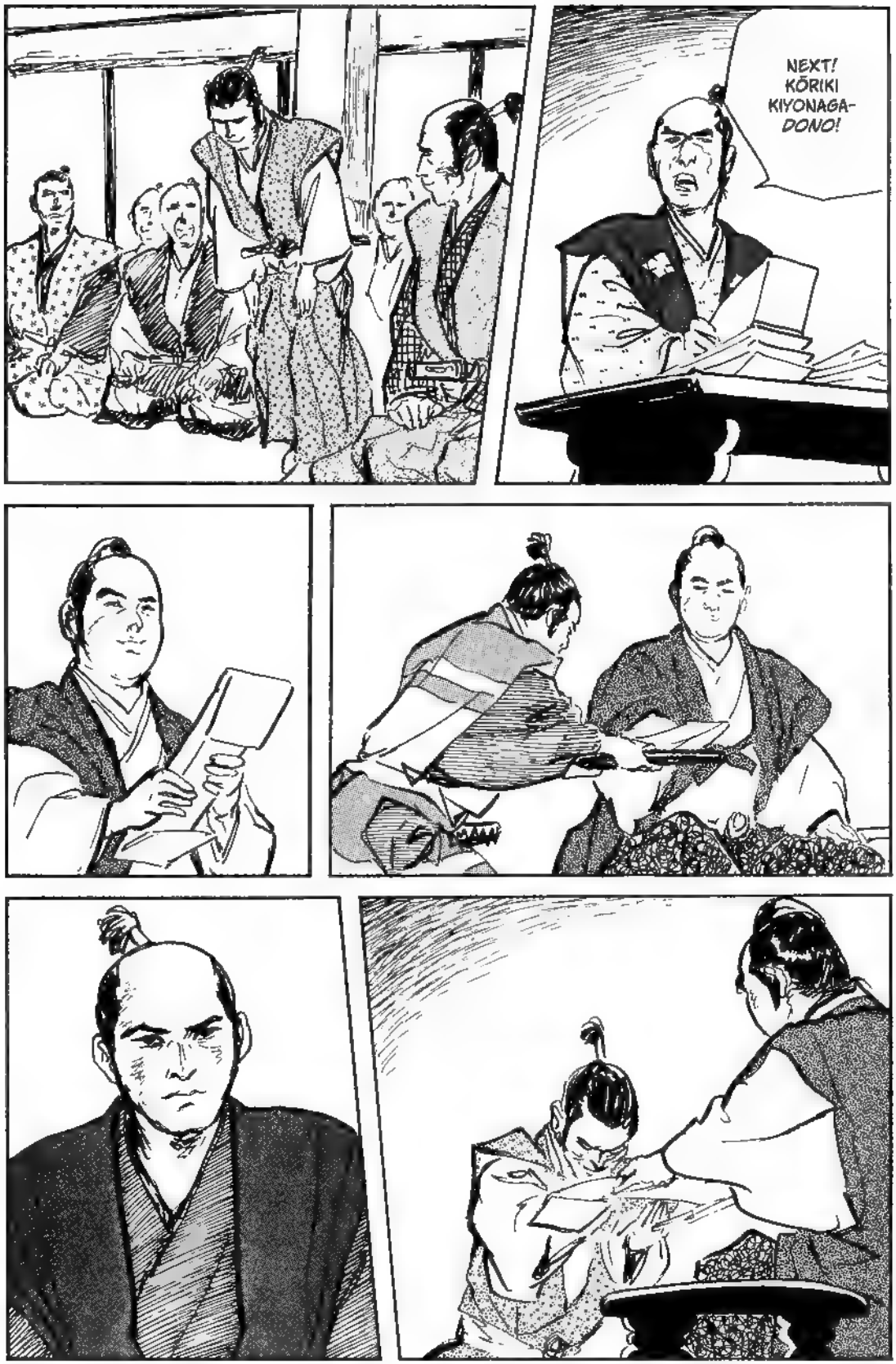
LET ALONE ANY MISTRESS YOU MAY TAKE.
KEEP THAT UP, AND NO GIRL WILL FIND YOU DESIRABLE.
HO HO HO HO HO HO HO HO.
HO HO HO HO HO.
INTERESTING.
OF COURSE.
INDEED.

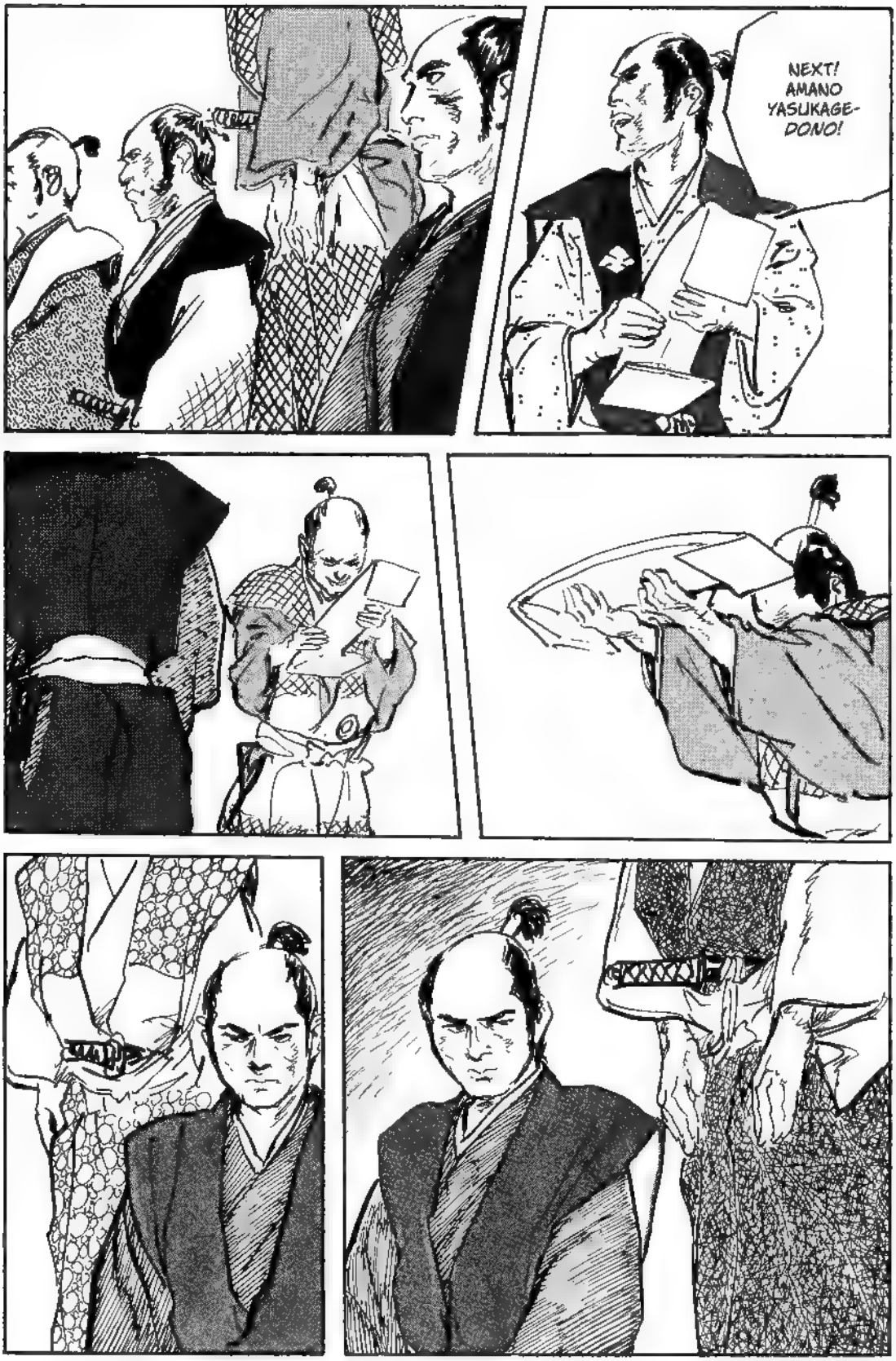
# Chapter On Jōsha Hissui

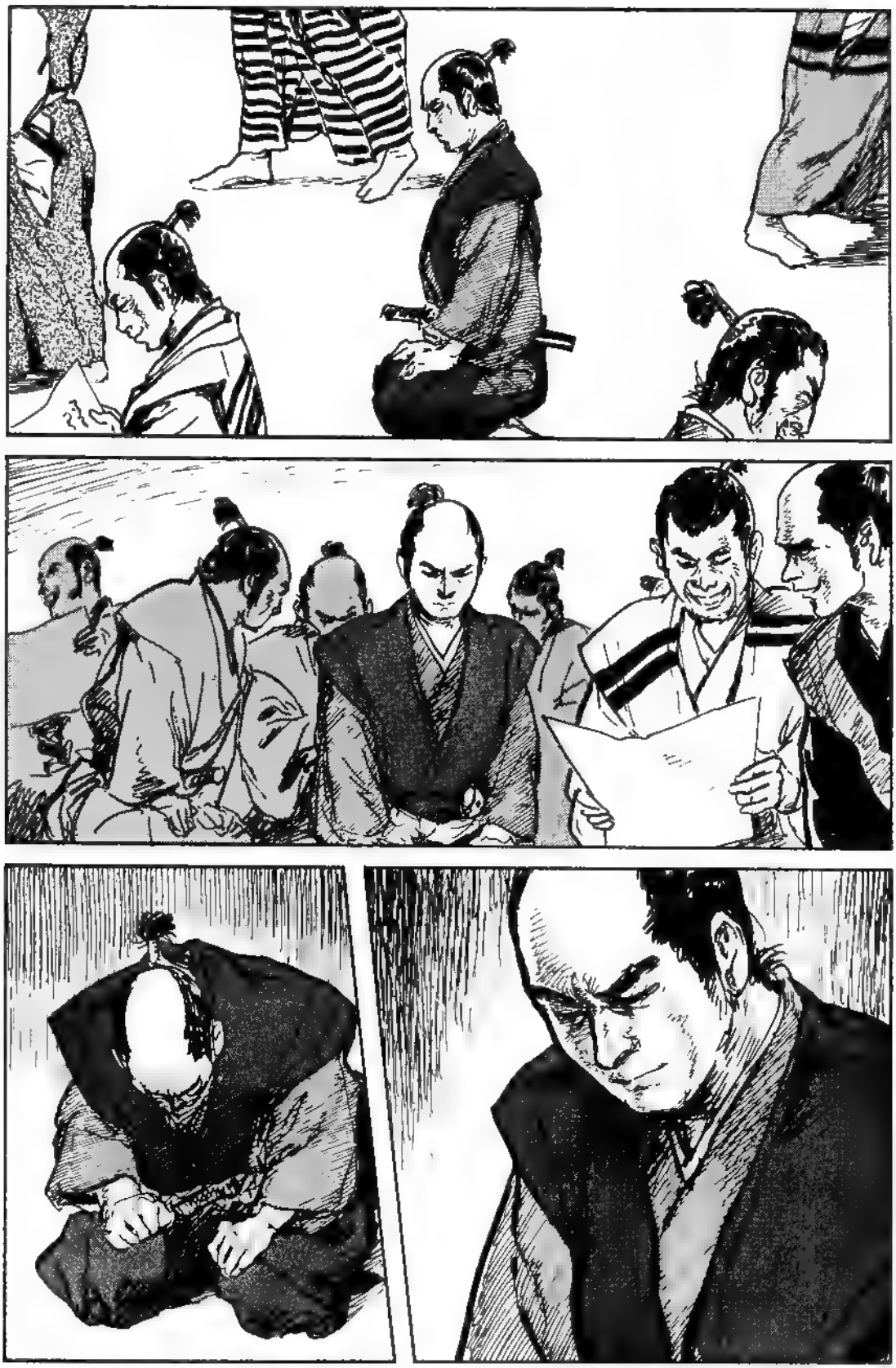
## No. 1: Center of the World



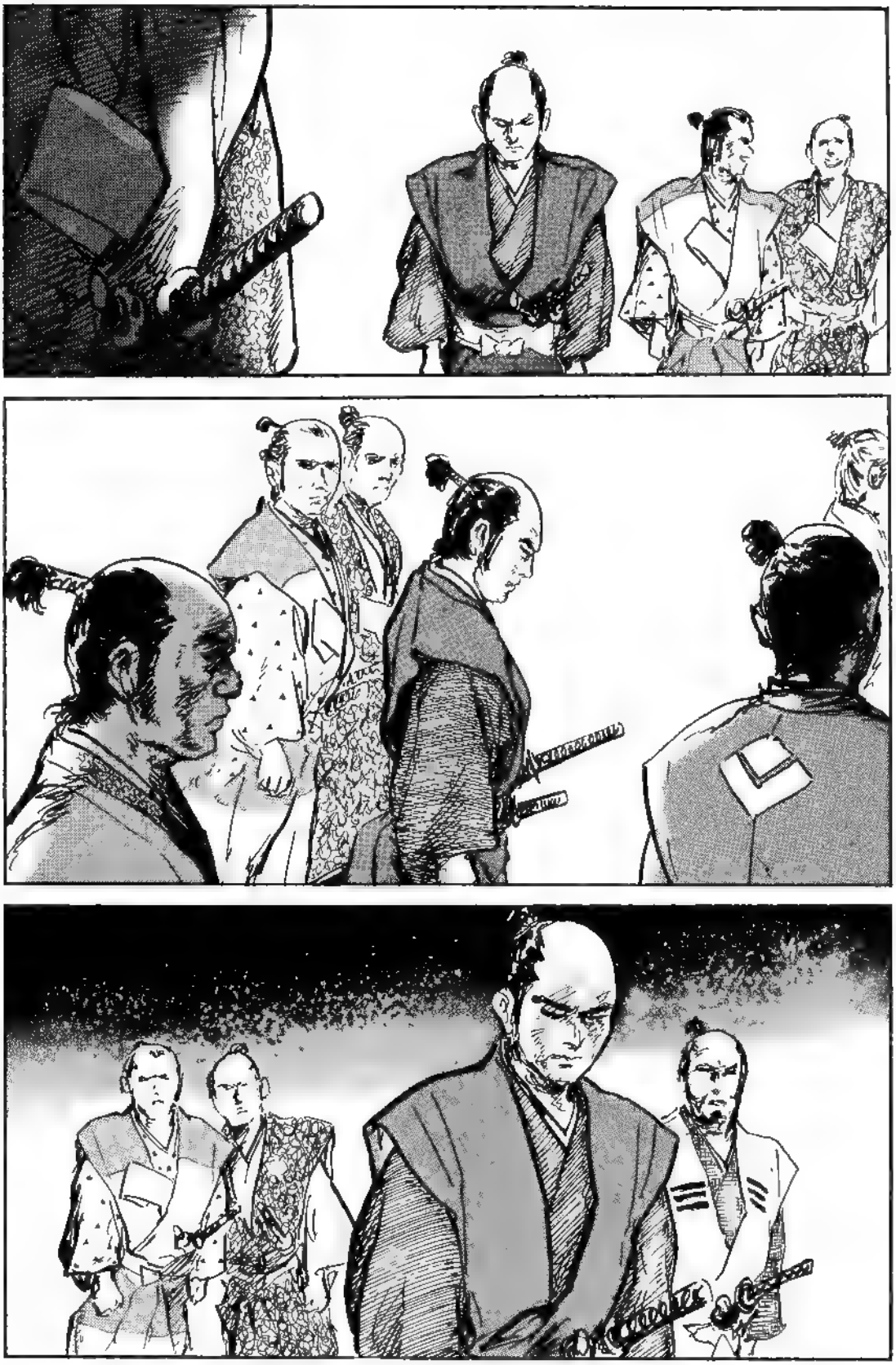



NEXT! KÖRIKI KIYONAGA-DONO!
SAM


NEXT! AMANO YASUKAGE-DONO!



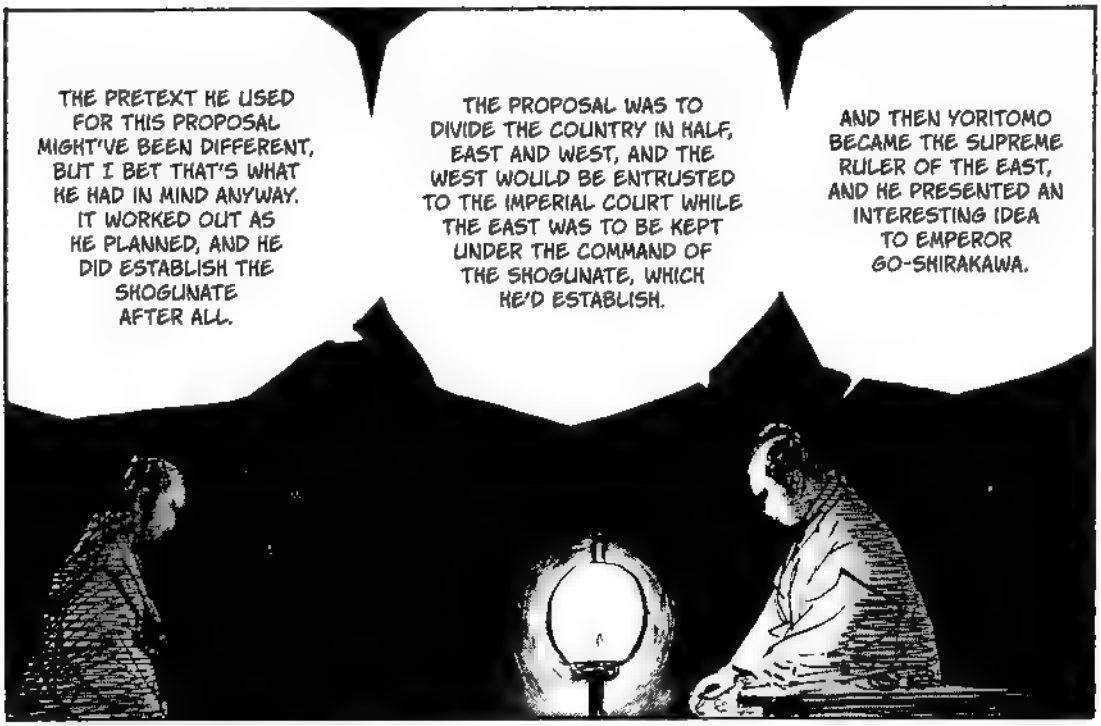
I THOUGHT HE CONTRIBUTED THE MOST IN SUPPRESSING THE UPRISING MYSELF.
I THOUGHT HATTORI HANZO MASANARI WOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS THE MAN WITH THE GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS.
SHHH!
AND MORE THAN HALF OF THOSE WHO DIDN'T JOIN THE INSURGENTS ARE REWARDED. WHY IS IT THAT ONLY HATTORI-*DONO* ISN'T?
IT'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE. THOSE WHO SIDED WITH THE REBELLION DON'T GET PUNISHED, AND THEIR FIEFDOMS ARE GUARANTEED.

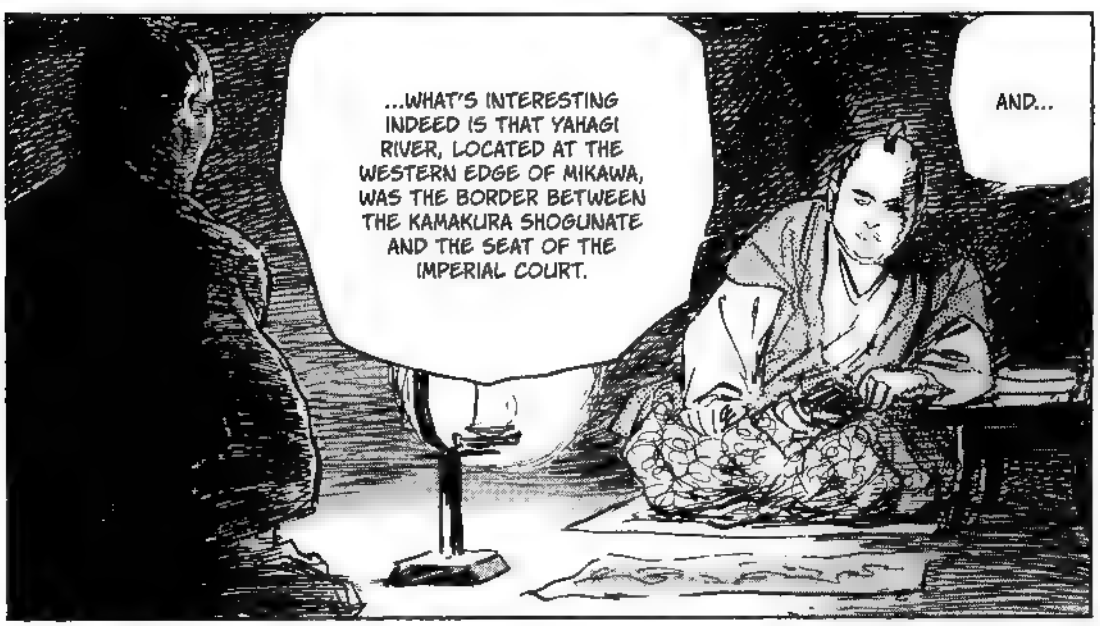


THOSE WHO DID NOT FIGHT DIRECTLY UNDER MY MASTER'S COMMAND...
I WONDER IF MILORD THINKS THE *SHINOBI* TECHNIQUES I EMPLOY ARE A LOWLY MAN'S ART AFTER ALL...
THAT IS, KŌRIKI-*DONO* OF NUKATANOKOORI, AMANO-*DONO*, AND EVEN CHIKAHISA-*DONO* OF OSHIKAMO...
THEY ALL RECEIVED REWARDS. WHY DID I NOT GET ANY?
HM.
DOES IT MATTER? WE DON'T SERVE HIM BECAUSE WE WANT TO BE REWARDED, DO WE?
I'M SURE HE HAS SOME GOOD REASON FOR THIS.

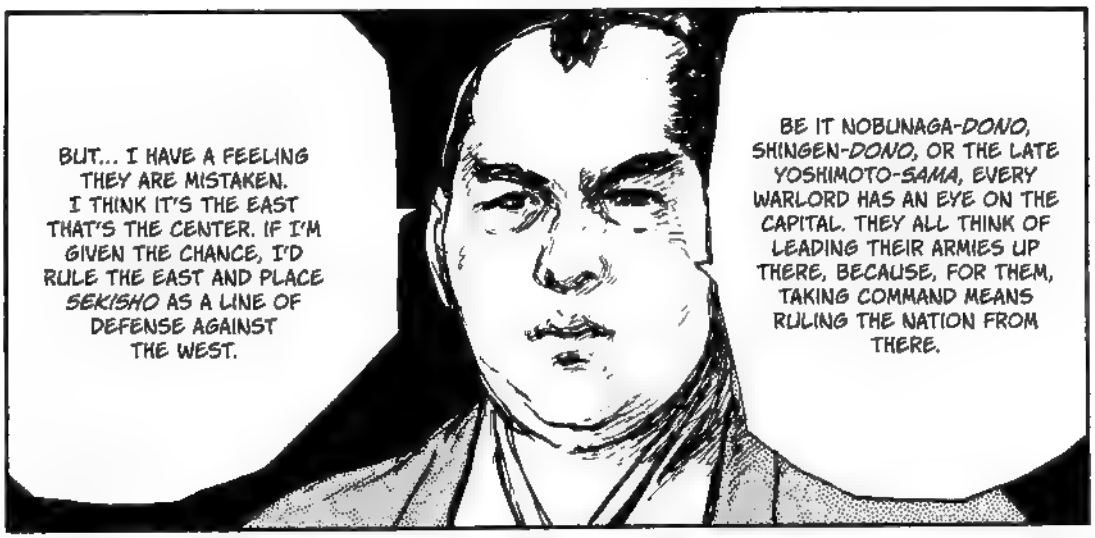
WELL, HANZŌ.
DURING THE ANCIENT *RITSURYŌ* REGIME, THEY HAD THREE *SEKI*--SUZUKA, FUWA, AND ARACHI--THAT SERVED AS DEFENSE LINES FOR *KINAI*.
YES, SIR.
WHEN I LOOK AT THEIR POSITIONS, IT'S CLEAR THAT EVERY *SEKISHO* WAS MEANT TO DEFEND AGAINST THE EAST. NONE WERE DIRECTED AGAINST THE WEST.

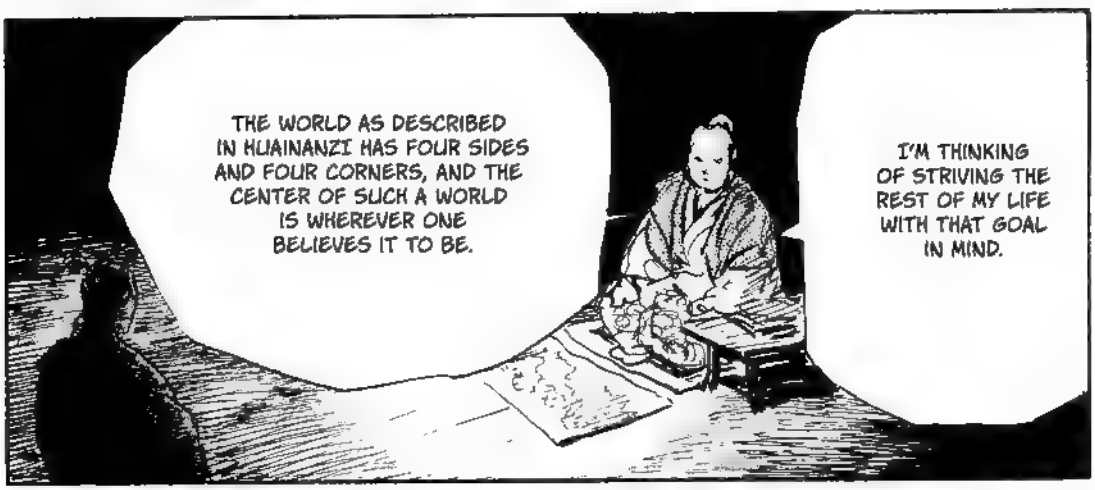
YES...
IN OTHER WORDS, THE ANCIENT *RITSURYŌ* GOVERNMENT WAS IN THE WEST AND RULED THE EAST
HEISHI WAS DEFEATED AT PLACES THAT PARALLEL THE THREE *SEKI*.
IT BECOMES EVEN MORE APPARENT SINCE THE BATTLE BETWEEN GENJI AND HEIKE TOOK PLACE LATER.
IN FACT, THAT'S WHAT MY TEACHER, TAIGEN SŌFU SESSAI-*DONO*, TOLD ME. IT'S INTERESTING HOW OBVIOUS IT IS WHEN I ACTUALLY LOOK AT IT.
WHEN GENJI BROKE THE DEFENSES AT THE THREE *SEKI*, HEISHI PULLED FURTHER BACK INTO THE WEST AND PERISHED AT THE CLIFF FARTHEST IN THAT DIRECTION, CALLED DAN-NO-URA
KURIKARA CORRESPONDS TO ARACHI, SUNOMATA CORRESPONDS TO FUWA, AND THE UJI RIVER CORRESPONDS TO SUZUKA.

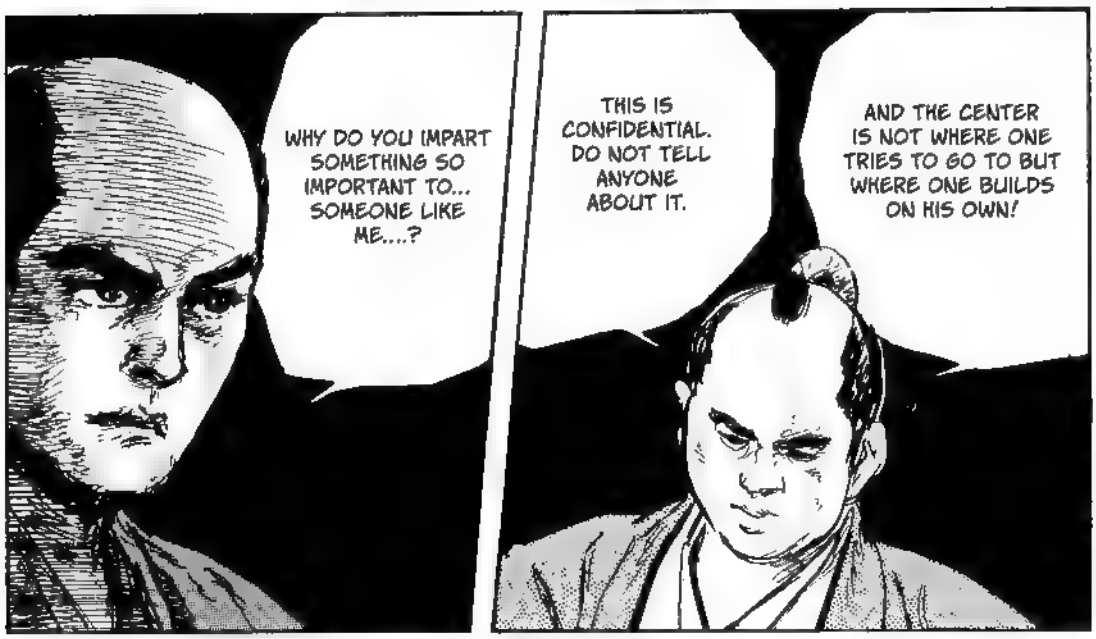

THE PRETEXT HE USED FOR THIS PROPOSAL MIGHT'VE BEEN DIFFERENT, BUT I BET THAT'S WHAT HE HAD IN MIND ANYWAY. IT WORKED OUT AS HE PLANNED, AND HE DID ESTABLISH THE SHOGUNATE AFTER ALL.
THE PROPOSAL WAS TO DIVIDE THE COUNTRY IN HALF, EAST AND WEST, AND THE WEST WOULD BE ENTRUSTED TO THE IMPERIAL COURT WHILE THE EAST WAS TO BE KEPT UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE SHOGUNATE, WHICH HE'D ESTABLISH.
AND THEN YORITOMO BECAME THE SUPREME RULER OF THE EAST, AND HE PRESENTED AN INTERESTING IDEA TO EMPEROR GO-SHIRAKAWA.


...WHAT'S INTERESTING INDEED IS THAT YAHAGI RIVER, LOCATED AT THE WESTERN EDGE OF MIKAWA, WAS THE BORDER BETWEEN THE KAMAKURA SHOGUNATE AND THE SEAT OF THE IMPERIAL COURT.
AND...

I WONDER IF THE CENTER OF THE COUNTRY IS KYOTO.
WELL, HANZŌ.


BUT... I HAVE A FEELING THEY ARE MISTAKEN. I THINK IT'S THE EAST THAT'S THE CENTER. IF I'M GIVEN THE CHANCE, I'D RULE THE EAST AND PLACE *SEKISHO* AS A LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST THE WEST.
BE IT NOBUNAGA-*DONO*, SHINGEN-*DONO*, OR THE LATE YOSHIMOTO-*SAMA*, EVERY WARLORD HAS AN EYE ON THE CAPITAL. THEY ALL THINK OF LEADING THEIR ARMIES UP THERE, BECAUSE, FOR THEM, TAKING COMMAND MEANS RULING THE NATION FROM THERE.

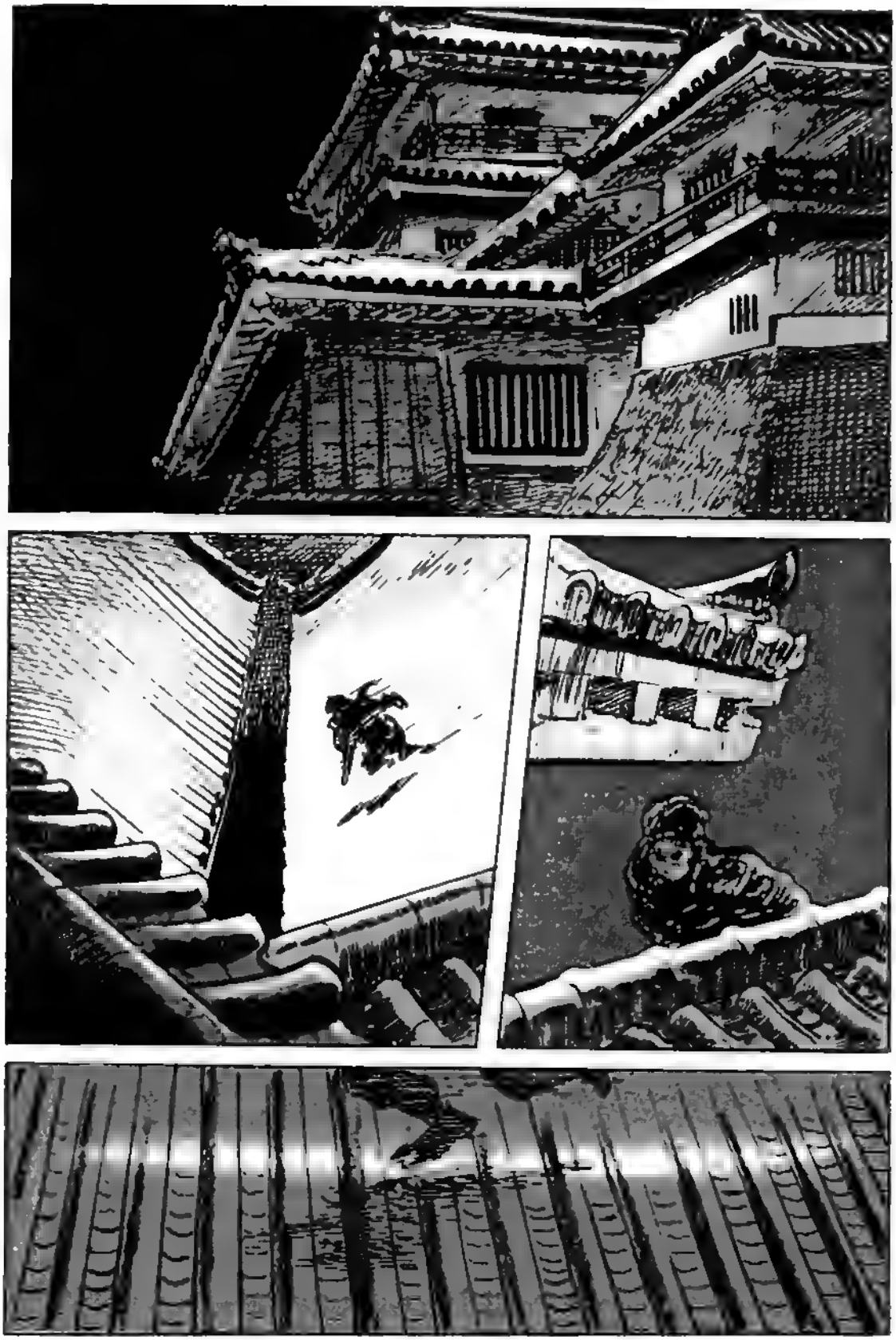

THE WORLD AS DESCRIBED IN HUAINANZI HAS FOUR SIDES AND FOUR CORNERS, AND THE CENTER OF SUCH A WORLD IS WHEREVER ONE BELIEVES IT TO BE.
I'M THINKING OF STRIVING THE REST OF MY LIFE WITH THAT GOAL IN MIND.

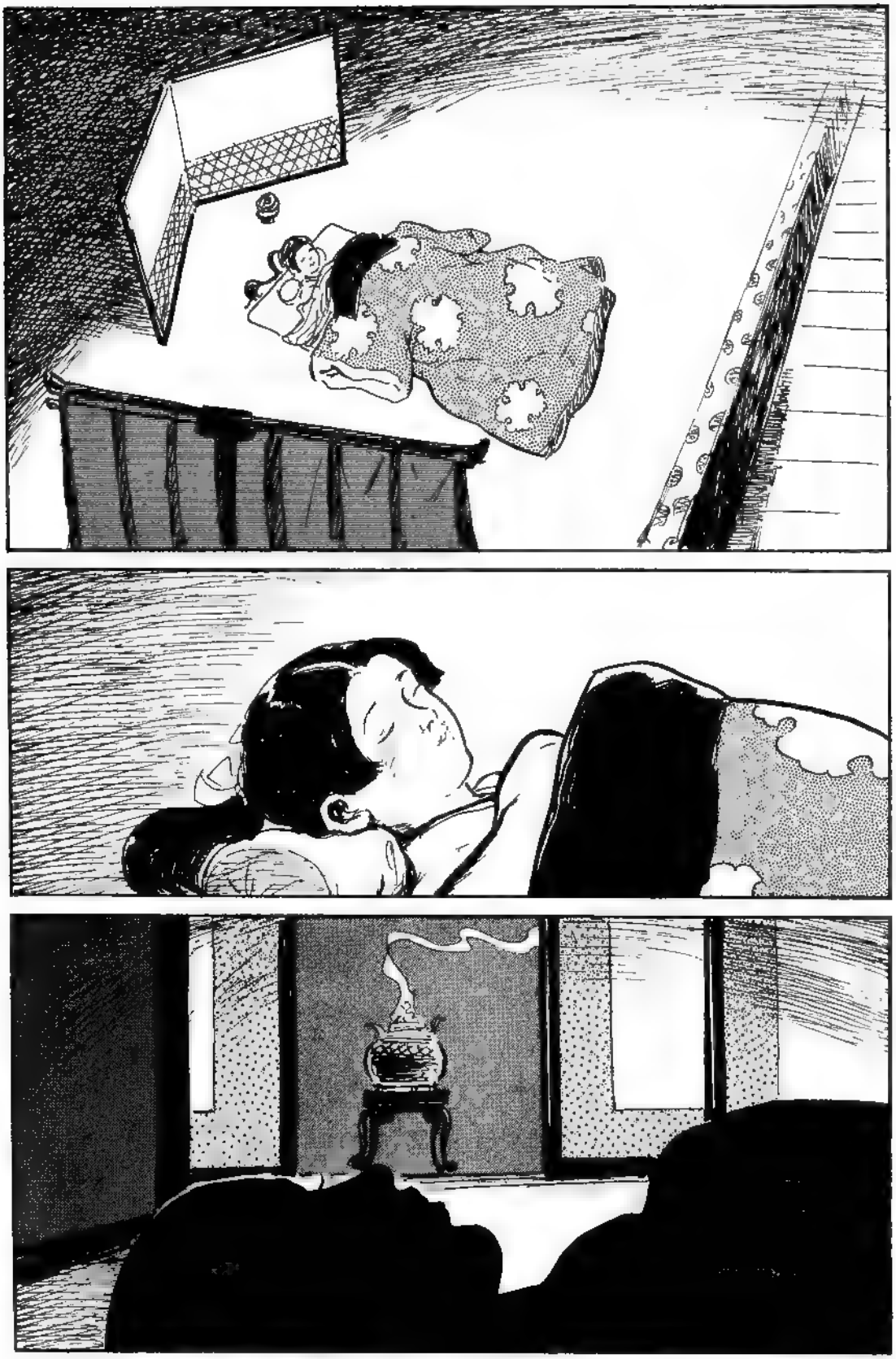

WHY DO YOU IMPART SOMETHING SO IMPORTANT TO... SOMEONE LIKE ME....?
THIS IS CONFIDENTIAL. DO NOT TELL ANYONE ABOUT IT.
AND THE CENTER IS NOT WHERE ONE TRIES TO GO TO BUT WHERE ONE BUILDS ON HIS OWN!

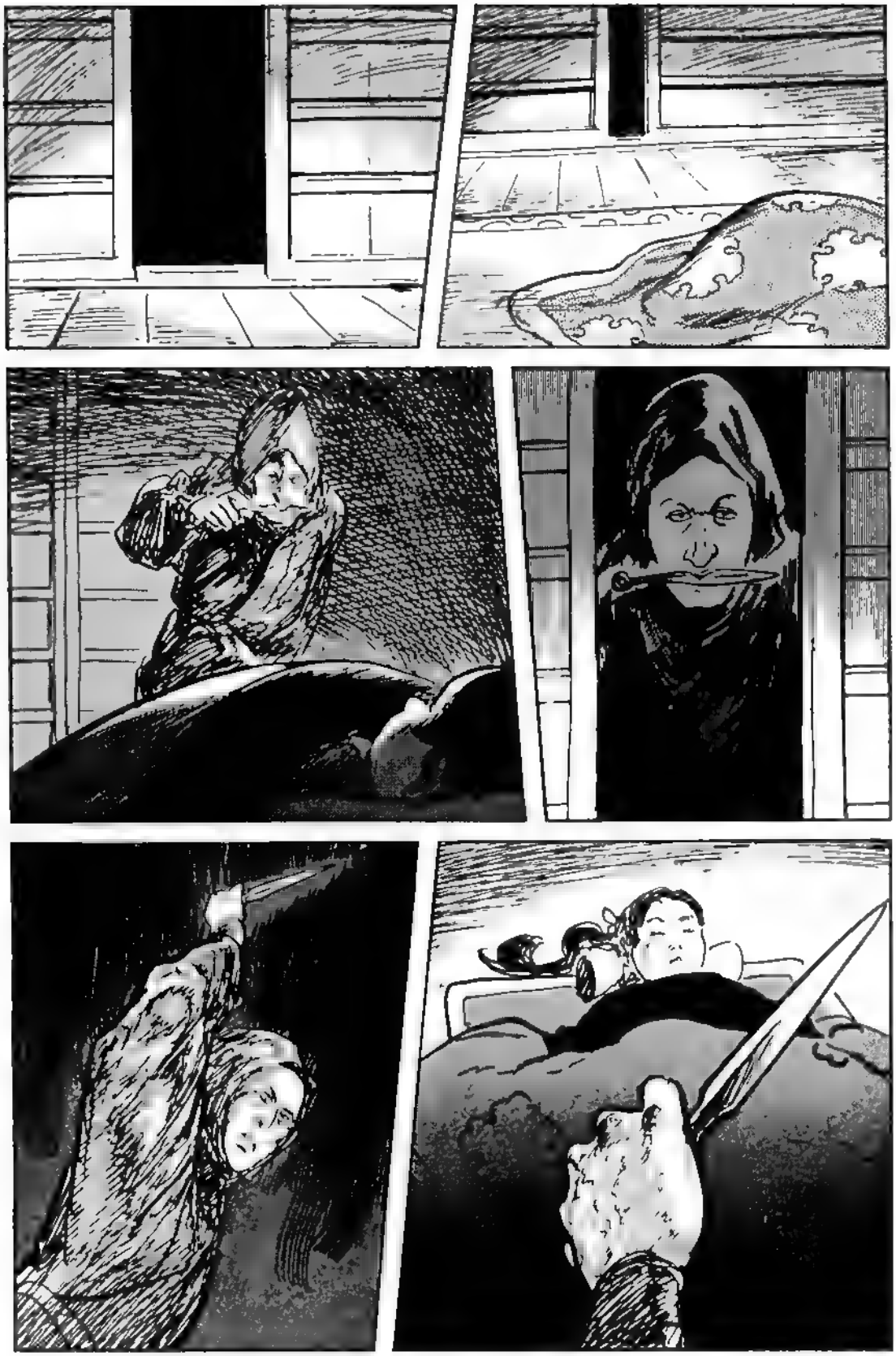
BUT MEN ARE JEALOUS CREATURES.
I'M MORE THAN HAPPY TO REWARD YOU AND GRANT YOU A KEY POSITION.
IN SHORT, I'M BEING SELFISH. IF YOU WERE MY VASSAL, I WOULD TREAT YOU ACCORDINGLY. BUT YOU ARE...
IT WOULD MAKE IT HARD FOR ME TO HAVE YOU ALWAYS BY MY SIDE.
...MY FRIEND.

# Chapter On Jōsha Hissui

## No. 2: Child of Smoke



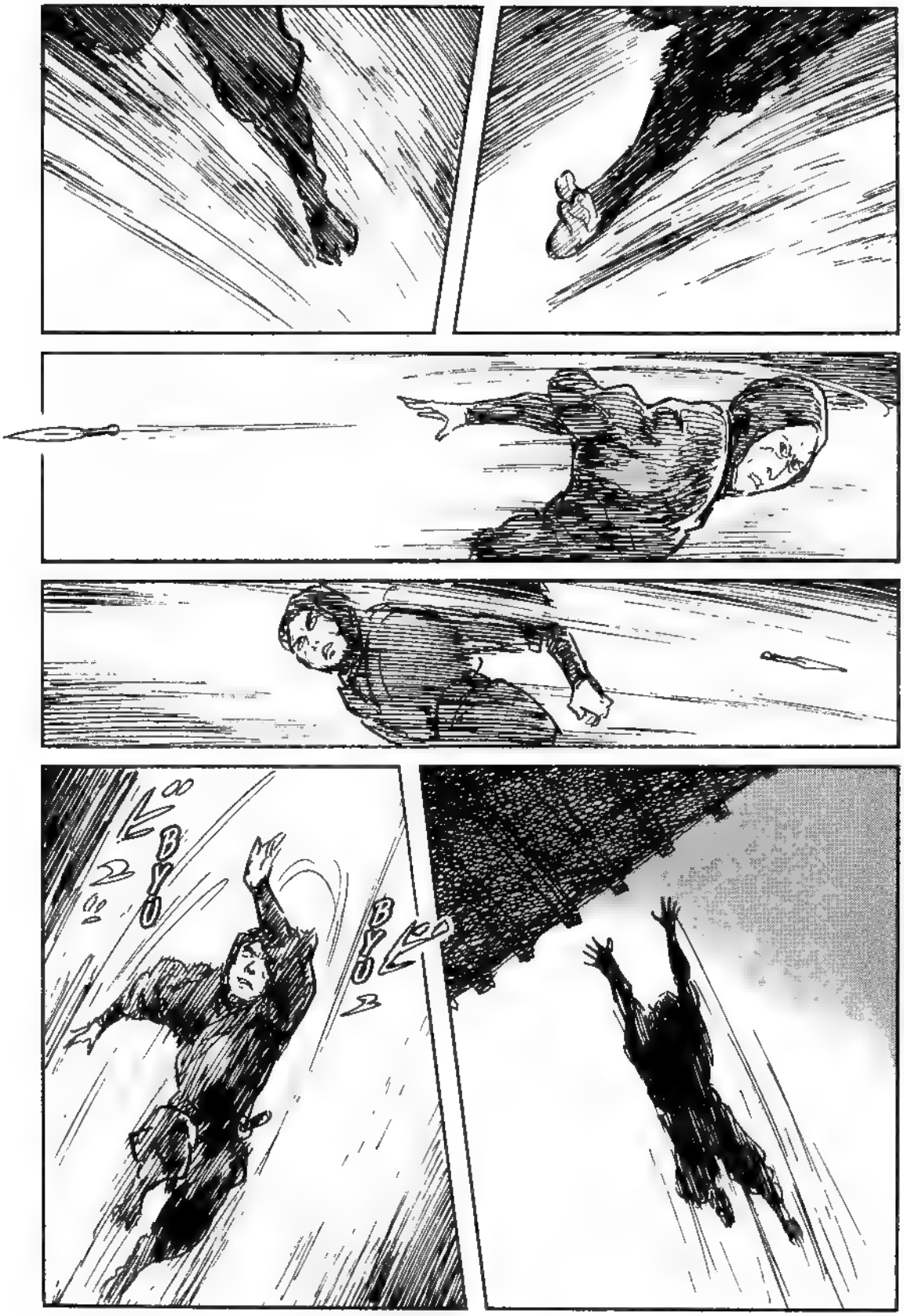




ZZSH
BY

UGH!!

EXCELLENT, HATTORI HANZŌ!
HE WAS AFTER TAKECHIYO-SAMA... BUT WHO IS HE? AND WHY?
YOU'RE SO PREPARED EVEN AT NIGHT THAT NOT THE TINIEST MOUSE COULD SNEAK IN.


BYU
BYU

THUK
THUK

GET THE LIGHT!
H... HII-SAMA!!
IT'S FINE.
HE IS DANGEROUS! PLEASE STEP BACK!
HIS VOICE SOUNDS FAMILIAR TO ME.

G...
GŪJI-DONO,
IT'S YOU!

WHAT?!
IT TURNS OUT, HE IS HER ACQUAINTANCE. FROM WHAT I HEAR, HE'S THE CHIEF PRIEST OF THE FUJI ICHINOMIYA SHRINE. MILADY IS TREATING HIS WOUNDS RIGHT NOW.
I WOUNDED HIM BADLY BUT BEFORE I COULD CAPTURE HIM, MILADY TOOK OVER...
DID YOU KILL HIM, MASANARI?
SMEEE
CHIK
BESIDES, I ORDERED MY MEN TO FORM A KEKKAI SHIELD. HE WON'T BE ABLE TO GET AWAY ALIVE.
HE SNUCK IN ALONE. I SENSE NO OTHER THREAT.
NOT EVEN A DEMON CAN COME CLOSE TO TAKECHIYO-SAMA.
BUT WHAT AN EXCELLENT GUARDIAN YOU ARE.
GOOD.

THE SLIGHTEST BREEZE WILL DISTURB IT, AND ITS ODOR WILL DIFFUSE.
I ALWAYS HAVE IT BURNING.
IT'S THE SMOKE. I SMELL THE FUMES FROM THE INCENSE.
YOU ARE INCREDIBLE YOURSELF
THAT YOU'VE DEVISED SUCH PRECAUTIONS IS EXCELLENT.
ARE YOU SURE MILADY IS SAFE WITH HIM?
WHO KNOWS...
BUT THE CHIEF PRIEST OF THE ICHINOMIYA MEANS IT'S IMAGAWA. WHY ARE THEY AFTER TAKECHIYO-SAMA?
BY THE TIME I RUSHED OUT, YOU WERE ALREADY THERE. ANYWAY, I'M GLAD IT LED TO NO GREAT HARM.

I TOLD HER. BUT STILL, SHE INSISTED THAT I LEAVE.
DOES SHE KNOW HE CAME AFTER TAKECHIYO-SAMA'S LIFE?
WITH THAT WOUND, HE MAY LAST HALF AN HOUR AT THE MOST.
HE HAS NO STRENGTH LEFT TO HURT HER.
SAME HERE.
I ALWAYS FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE AROUND MILADY...
WE'D BETTER MAKE HIM TALK BEFORE HE'S DEAD.

TAKECHIYO IS MY SON!
GŪJI-DONO, WHY DID YOU?!
...SOON MARRIED TO... TOKU-HIME OF ODA. TO BLOCK IT... UJIZANE-SAMA ORDERED ME TO...
TAKECHIYO-GIMI WILL BE...
WHY?! TELL ME!
NO! I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT!
GAK!!
ARE... ARE YOU NOT INFORMED...?! THEY WERE ENGAGED IN MARCH LAST YEAR...
WHA... WHAT?! A PRINCESS OF ODA AND TAKECHIYO?!

AND DEFINITELY BY THE NEXT... THEY WILL BE MARRIED... THAT'S WHAT IMAGAWA BELIEVES.
AS... EARLY AS... THIS YEAR...
AND THE PRINCESS MUST BE ABOUT THE SAME AGE! HOW... HOW CAN THEY...
TA... TAKECHIYO IS ONLY FOUR YEARS OLD!

THEIR AGE IS IRRELEVANT.
THE POINT IS, THE ODA AND MIKAWA MATSUDAIRA CLANS WILL BECOME RELATED BY MATRIMONY.
IF NOBUNAGA AND IEYASU-SAMA ESTABLISH A FIRM ALLIANCE NOW, IMAGAWA'S POSITION WILL ONLY DETERIORATE.
SO WE MUST THWART IT BY TERMINATING TAKECHIYO-SAMA.

HAA
HAA
HOW CRUEL HE IS.
UJIZANE-DONO ASSIGNED YOU A TASK LIKE THIS...?
HM!
I CAN THINK OF NO OTHER REASON.
ARE THEY TRYING TO BREAK THE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN TAKECHIYO-GIMI AND TOKU-HIME-SAMA?

WE MUST TIGHTEN OUR SECURITY MORE THAN EVER.
THAT UJIZANE! HE'S HOPELESS WHEN IT COMES TO WAR, BUT MASTERFUL WHEN IT COMES TO BEING DEVIOUS.
YUP.
U... UJIZANE-SAMA...
...CHOSE ME... FOR THIS ASSASSINATION...

...ONLY BECAUSE HE MUST'VE THOUGHT... I WOULD SEEK YOUR HELP AND GET INSIDE THE CASTLE WITHOUT TROUBLE.
IF THAT'S THE CASE, YOU COULD'VE COME TO ME AND TOLD ME EVERYTHING.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND! GUJI-DONO, I CAN'T READ YOUR MIND!
HAA
HAA
HAA
A CHIEF PRIEST CAN NEVER DESERT THE SHRINE HE SERVES.
I COULD'VE ARRANGED IT FOR YOU TO DESERT IMAGAWA AND SERVE MIKAWA INSTEAD.

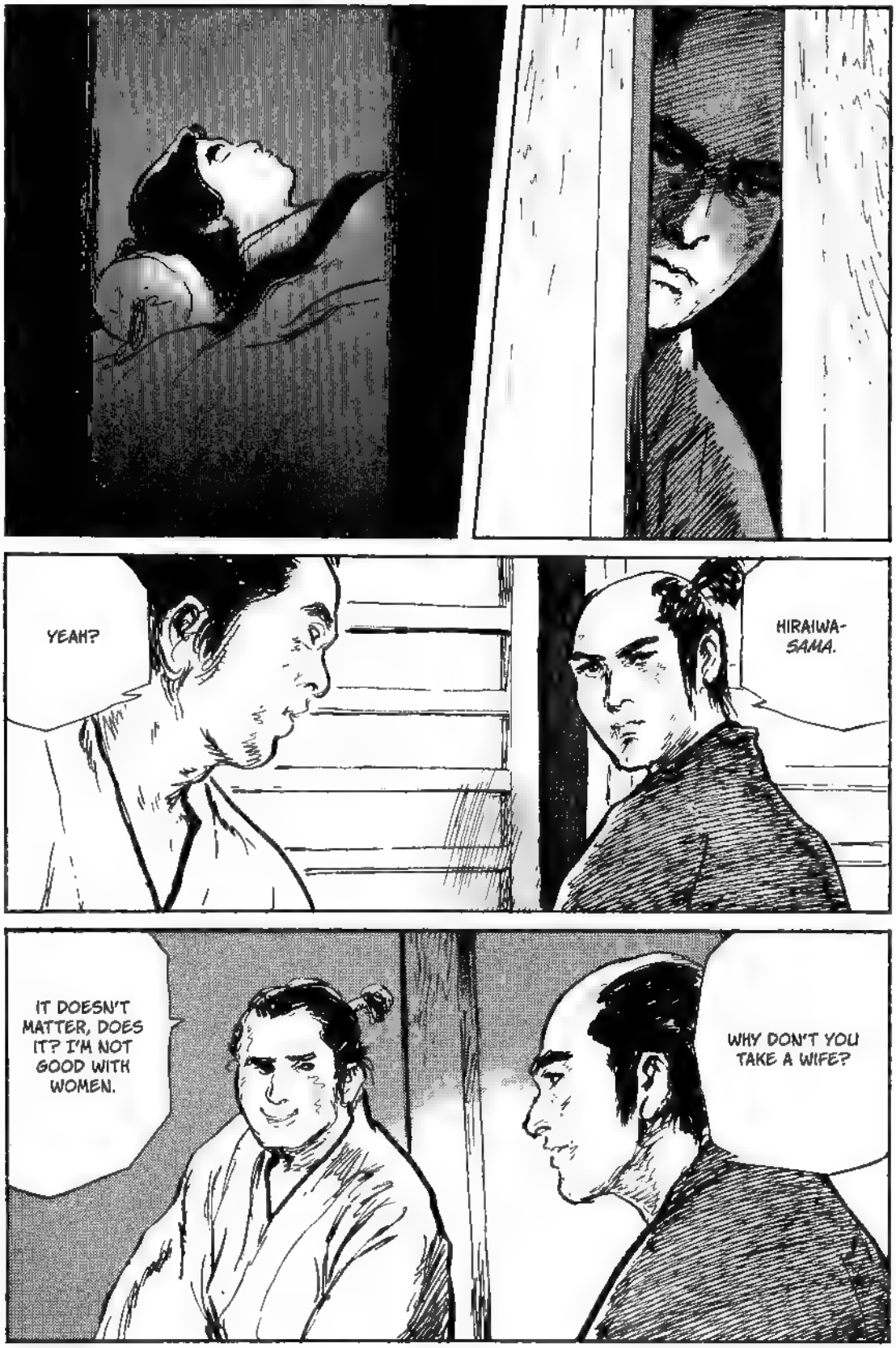
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THE KINDNESS I BESTOWED UPON YOU?!
Y... YES.
...WITH EVERY INTENTION OF KILLING TAKECHIYO?! MY SON?!
THEN, GŪJI-DONO, ARE YOU SAYING YOU CAME IN...
Y... YOU TOO MUST...
...KNOW MY FEELINGS, HII-SAMA.

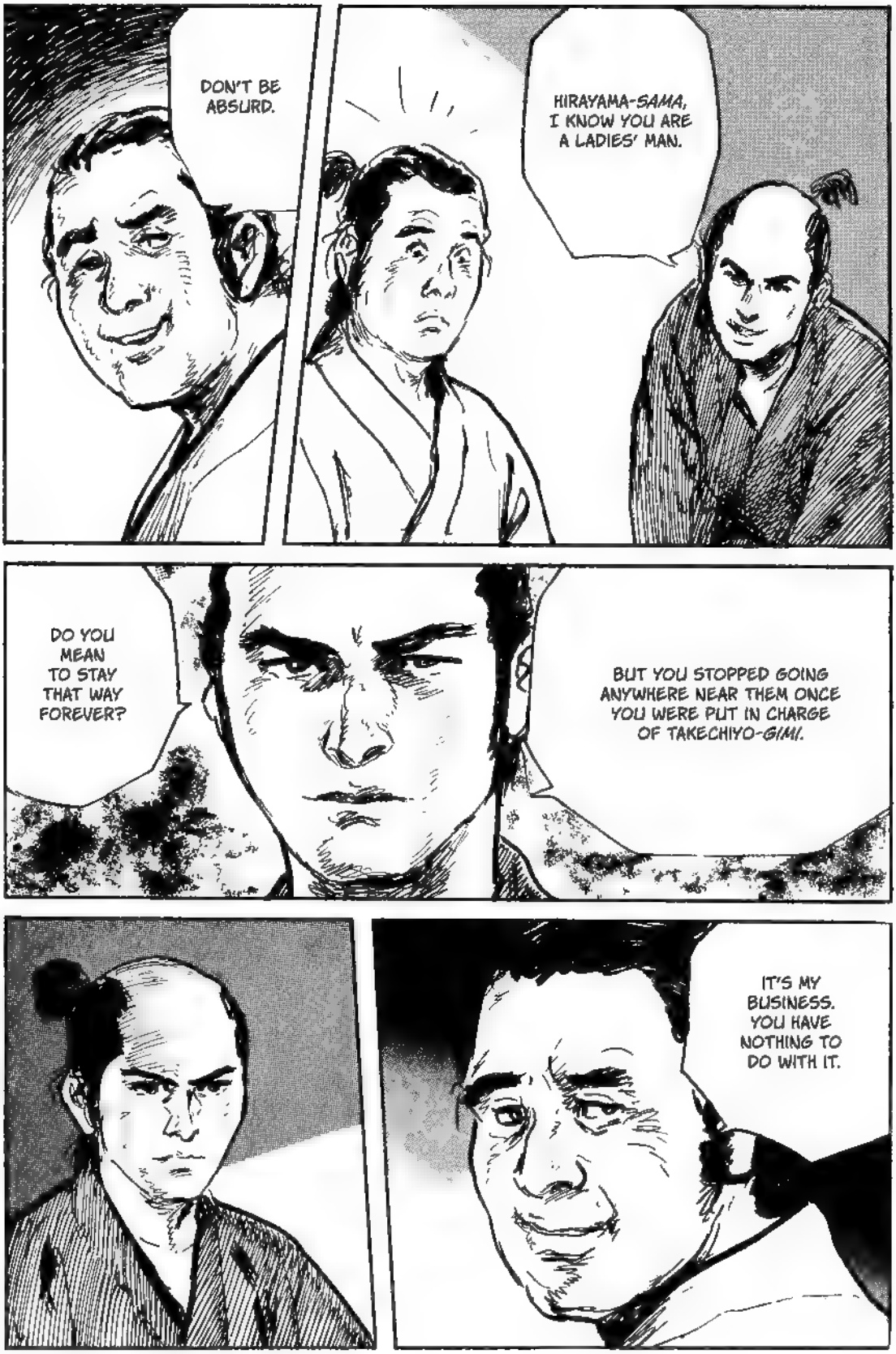
AND... I LOATHE IEYASU! AND HIS SON, TAKECHIYO-SAMA, TOO!
I HAVE HELD TENDER FEELINGS... FOR YOU!
EVER SINCE YOU SAVED MY LIFE, HII-SAMA... I... I...
U... UJIZANE-SAMA IS... VERY WELL AWARE OF HOW I FEEL...
THAT'S WHY... HE ASSIGNED ME THIS CHORE... TO KILL!

...IS IEYASU-DONO'S FALL... TAKECHIYO-SAMA'S DEATH...
...AND HII-SAMA, YOUR RETURN TO IMAGAWA!!
WH... WHAT I... DREAM NOW...
Y... YOU SHOULD NOT BE IN A PLACE LIKE THIS!
HII-SAMA... YOU ARE IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO-KŌ'S NIECE, AND YOUR HOME IS... SUNPU!
IT IS EVEN LESS ACCEPTABLE FOR YOU TO RECEIVE A DAUGHTER OF NOBUNAGA... THE MAN KILLED YOSHIMOTO-KŌ.

I... I TOOK THE ASSASSIN'S JOB FOR YOUR SAKE, HII-SAMA!
....
....
BUT... WHAT IS A CHILD WITH WHOM YOU SHARE YOUR OWN BLOOD LIKE...? AS HIS MOTHER, ANYONE WHO TRIES TO KILL HIM MUST BE A DREADFUL ENEMY.

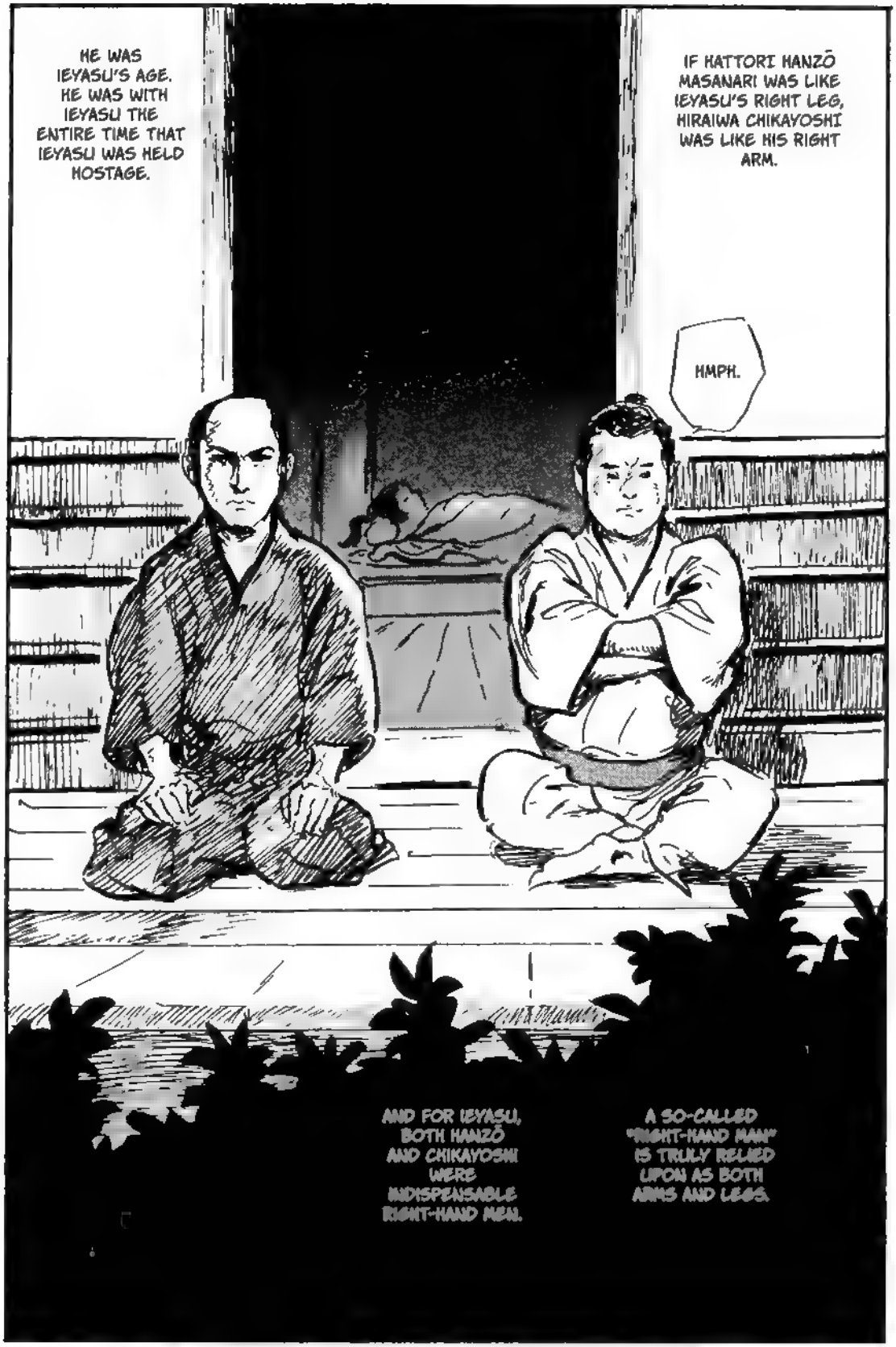
A CHILD... IS A CURIOUS THING....
AS FOR ME... AFTER YOU HAD YOUR BABY... YOU BECAME SOMEONE FAR AWAY... VERY FAR, *HII-SAMA.*
WHY WOULD I EVER LET MY SON TAKE OUR ENEMY'S DAUGHTER AS HIS WIFE!
HE IS MY SON! *GŪJI-DONO* DOESN'T NEED TO TELL ME. I KNOW TAKECHIYO IS MY CHILD!


YEAH?
HIRAIWA-SAMA.
IT DOESN'T MATTER, DOES IT? I'M NOT GOOD WITH WOMEN.
WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A WIFE?

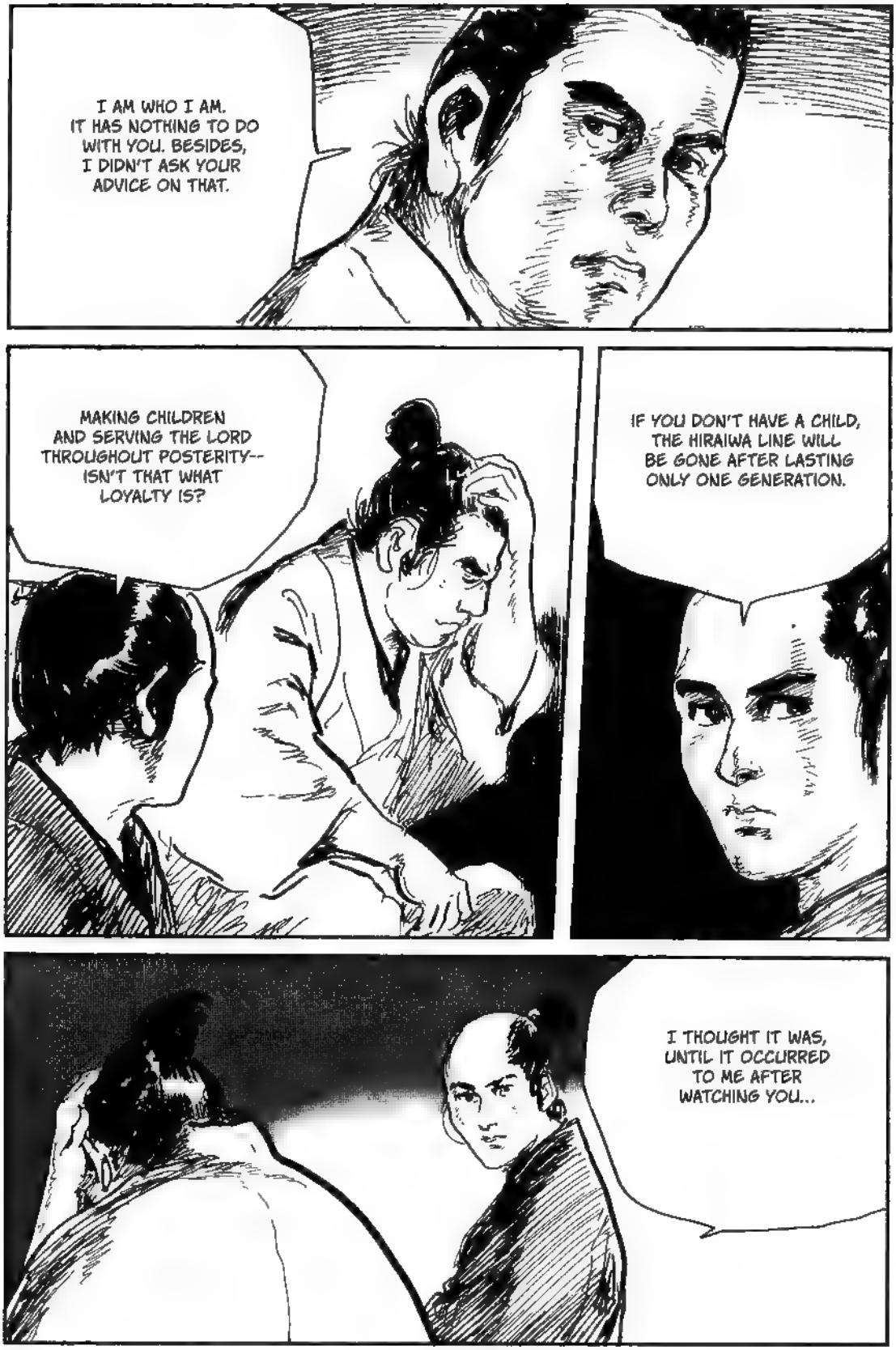

DON'T BE ABSURD.
HIRAYAMA-SAMA, I KNOW YOU ARE A LADIES' MAN.
DO YOU MEAN TO STAY THAT WAY FOREVER?
BUT YOU STOPPED GOING ANYWHERE NEAR THEM ONCE YOU WERE PUT IN CHARGE OF TAKECHIYO-GIMI.
IT'S MY BUSINESS. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.

WE IGAMONO ARE TAUGHT TO EXIST LIKE SMOKE.
NO SOUND, NO SMELL, NO NAME, NO FAME, AND NO GLORY--WE MUST LIVE LIKE SMOKE.
IT'S SO EASY TO FORGET THAT, SOMETIMES.
KNOWING I MUST EXIST LIKE SMOKE, IS IT RIGHT FOR ME TO HAVE A CHILD?
I FELT TROUBLED BY THE REWARD CEREMONY THE OTHER DAY.

TSUKUMO IS PREGNANT. PLEASE TELL ME WHETHER IT SHOULD BE ABORTED OR NOT.
IF I HAVE A CHILD, I WILL END UP LEAVING SOUND, SMELL, FOOTPRINTS, AND EVEN BLOOD BEHIND.
SMOKE DISAPPEARS LEAVING NO SOUND AND NO SMELL.


HE WAS IEYASU'S AGE. HE WAS WITH IEYASU THE ENTIRE TIME THAT IEYASU WAS HELD HOSTAGE.
IF HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI WAS LIKE IEYASU'S RIGHT LEG, HIRAIWA CHIKAYOSHI WAS LIKE HIS RIGHT ARM.
HMPH.
AND FOR IEYASU, BOTH HANZŌ AND CHIKAYOSHI WERE INDISPENSABLE RIGHT-HAND MEN.
A SO-CALLED "RIGHT-HAND MAN" IS TRULY RELIED UPON AS BOTH ARMS AND LEGS.

SHINOBI MIGHT BE LIKE SMOKE, BUT THEIR LINE WON'T LAST WITHOUT CHILDREN.
IF YOU WEREN'T BORN, WHAT WOULD'VE BEEN THE FUTURE OF THE HATTORI CLAN?
THEN WHY WERE YOU BORN INTO THIS WORLD?
I THOUGHT SO TOO--UNTIL YOU WERE PUT IN CHARGE OF TAKECHIYO-GIMI AND BECAME CELIBATE, HIRAIWA-SAMA.
A CHILD OF SMOKE WILL BE SMOKE TOO. WHAT'S WRONG WITH RAISING YOUR CHILD THAT WAY?


I AM WHO I AM. IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU. BESIDES, I DIDN'T ASK YOUR ADVICE ON THAT.
MAKING CHILDREN AND SERVING THE LORD THROUGHOUT POSTERITY-- ISN'T THAT WHAT LOYALTY IS?
IF YOU DON'T HAVE A CHILD, THE HIRAIWA LINE WILL BE GONE AFTER LASTING ONLY ONE GENERATION.
I THOUGHT IT WAS, UNTIL IT OCCURRED TO ME AFTER WATCHING YOU...

I MEAN, YOU ARE SERVING A MAN, NOT A CLAN.
HIRAIWA-*SAMA*, YOU ARE NOT SERVING THE CLAN BUT IEYASU-*SAMA*.

...SERVE THE CLAN CALLED MIKAWA MATSUDAIRA.
MOST OF MIKAWA *SAMURAI*... NO. I SHOULD SAY ALL OF THEM...

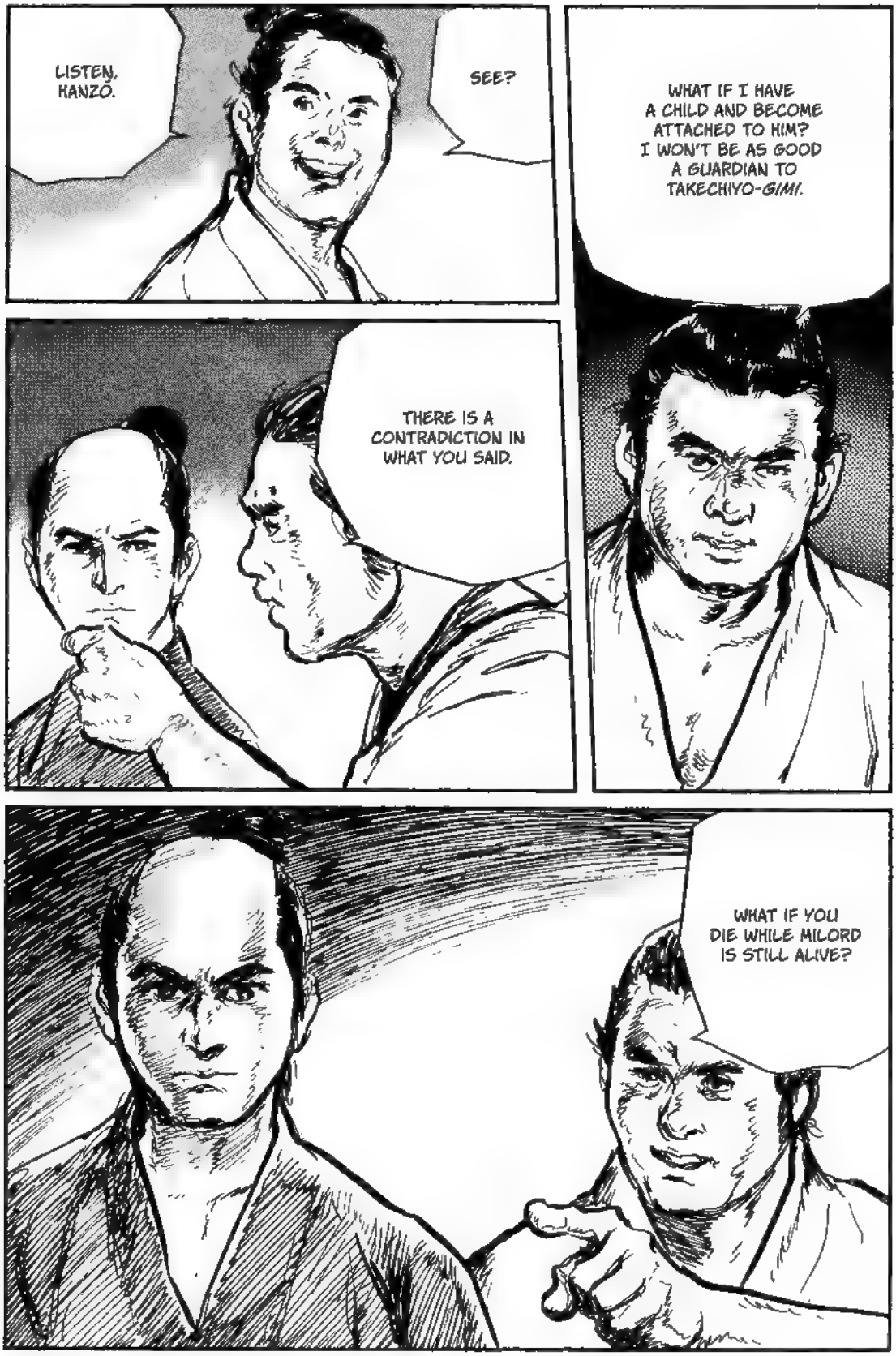
IN FACT, I DARE SAY, IT DOESN'T MATTER AT ALL WHOM THEY SERVE.
IN THAT SENSE, IT DOESN'T MATTER EVEN IF IT'S NOT IEYASU-SAMA WHOM THEY SERVE SO LONG AS THE CLAN CONTINUES.
MAKING CHILDREN AND ESTABLISHING A LASTING FAMILY THAT WILL SERVE THE LORD THROUGHOUT POSTERITY--THAT'S THE SPIRIT OF TRADITIONAL VALUES.
HOO
WHAT ABOUT ME THEN? THAT'S WHAT I ASKED MYSELF WHEN I CAME TO THAT CONCLUSION.
YOU DON'T MAKE CHILDREN BECAUSE YOU SERVE IEYASU-SAMA AND NONE OTHER.

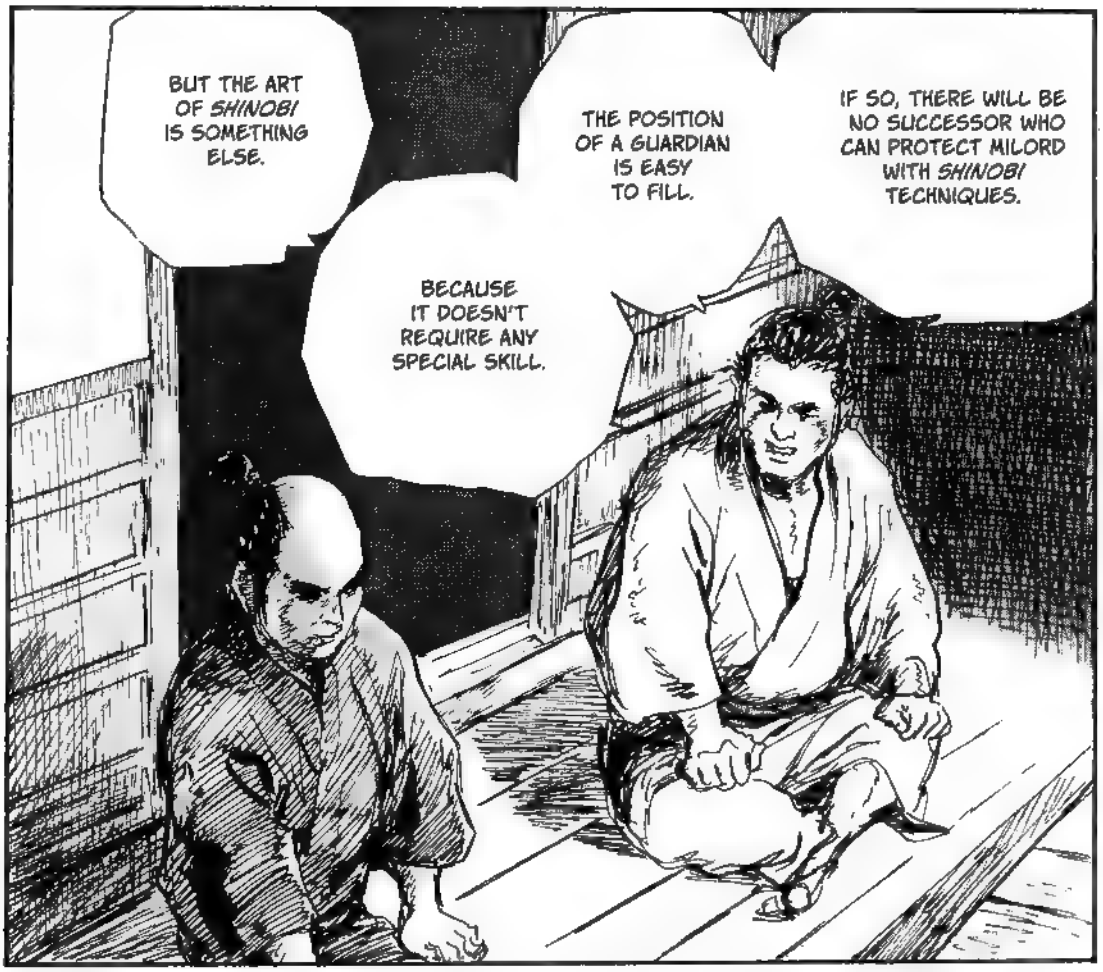
I AM THE SAME.
AND MY ANSWER WAS EXPLICITLY CLEAR.
I WILL ALSO HAVE MORE TO WORRY ABOUT.
I WILL GO HOME MORE FREQUENTLY, AND I MAY NOT BE AS AVAILABLE IN SECURING MILORD'S SAFETY.
ONCE I START A FAMILY AND HAVE CHILDREN, I WILL HAVE BAGGAGE TO CARRY.

ISN'T THAT HOW SMOKE LIKE US SHOULD LIVE? ISN'T THAT THE TRUEST FORM OF LOYALTY?
BUT IF I AM THE LAST OF MY LINE TO SERVE MY LORD, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DEVOTE MY LIFE TO HIM.
THAT'S WHY I SHOULD ABORT--
I WANT TO SERVE A MAN, NOT A CLAN-- JUST LIKE YOU, HIRAIWA-SAMA.
I DON'T SERVE MILORD.
YOU ARE WRONG!

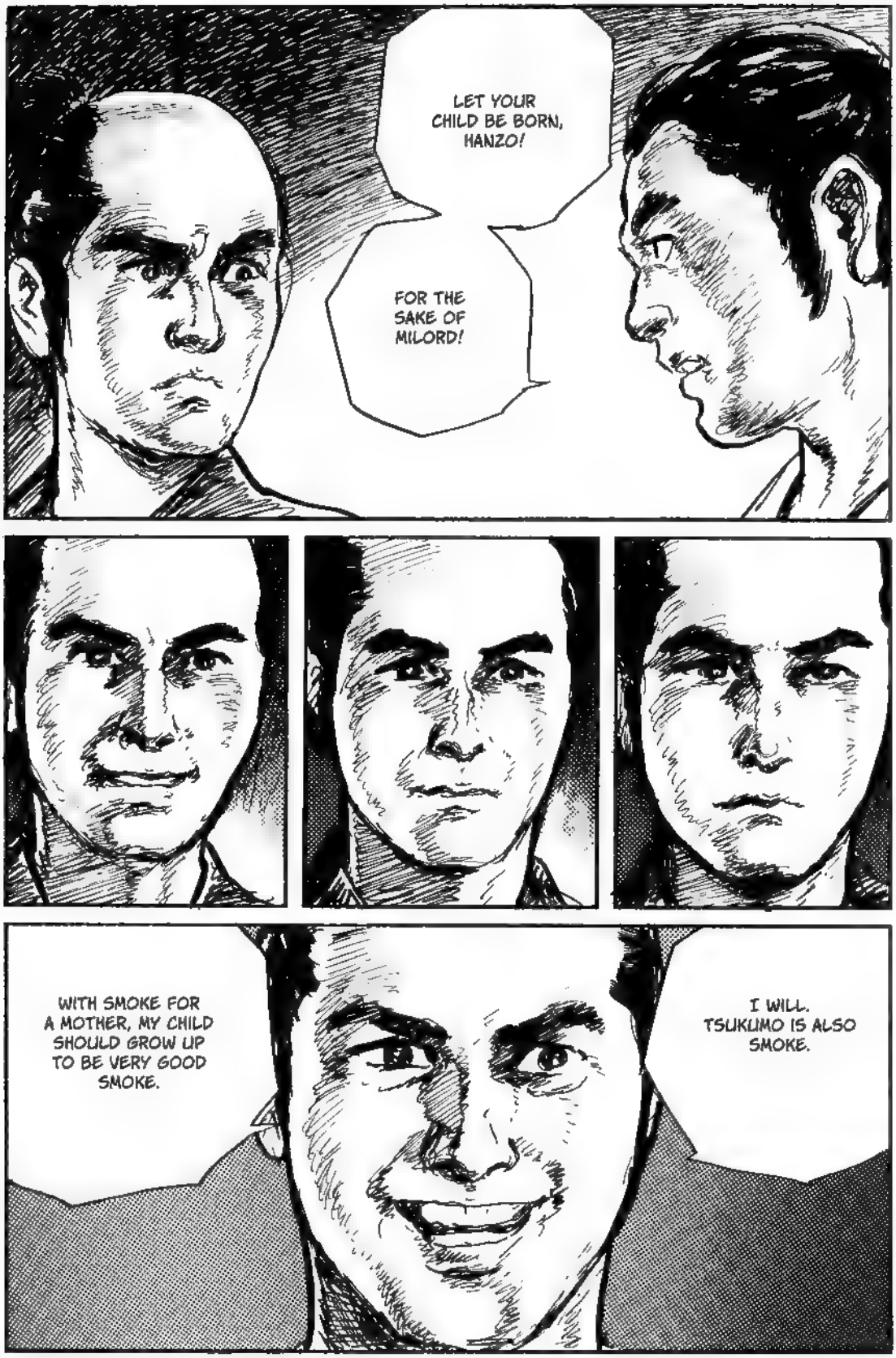
I SERVE TAKECHIYO-SAMA.
I...

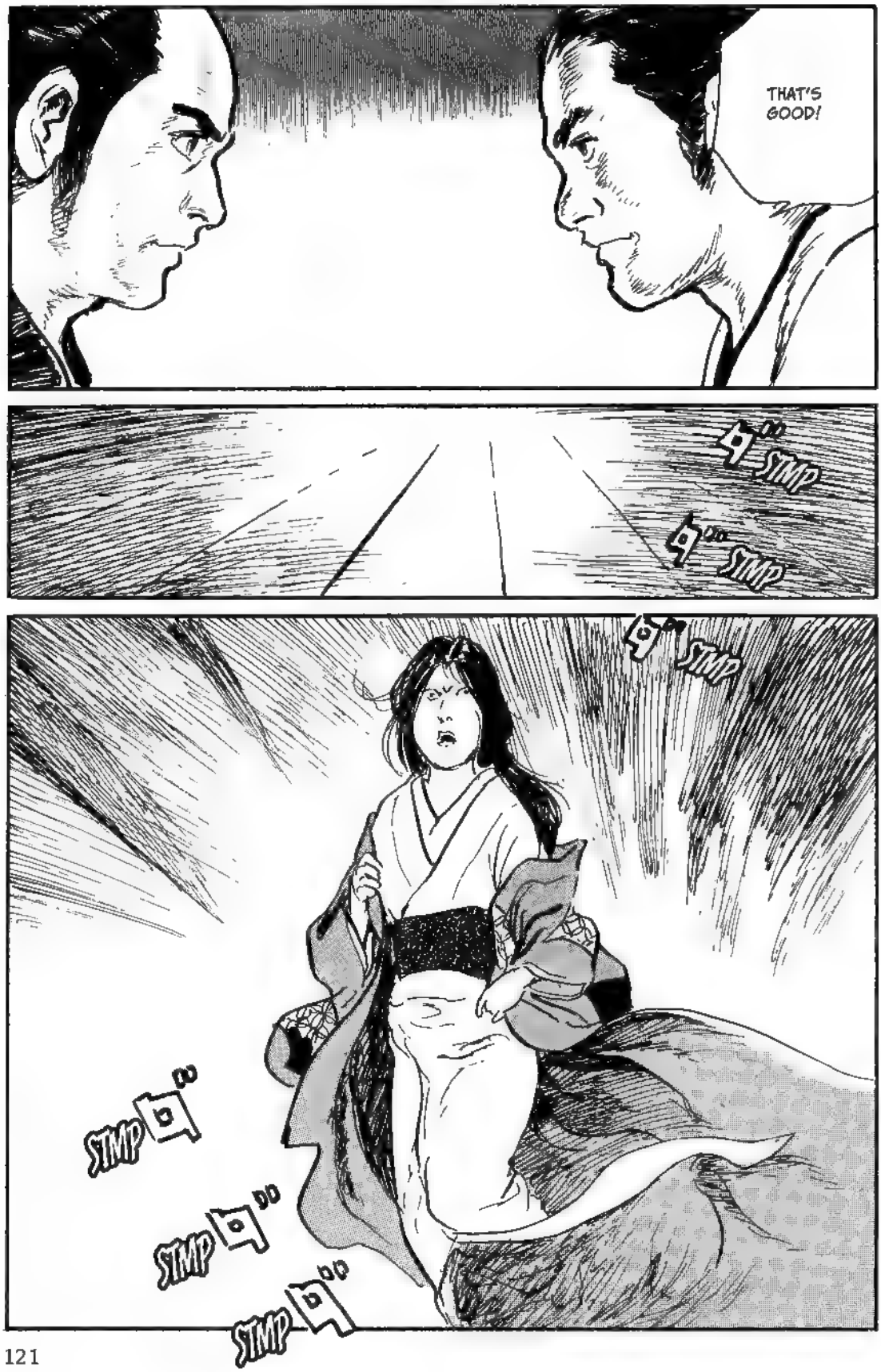
AND THAT'S WHY I DON'T MAKE CHILDREN.
I'VE KEPT THAT IN MIND EVER SINCE I WAS ORDERED TO LOOK AFTER HIM.


LISTEN, HANZŌ.
SEE?
WHAT IF I HAVE A CHILD AND BECOME ATTACHED TO HIM? I WON'T BE AS GOOD A GUARDIAN TO TAKECHIYO-*GIMI*.
THERE IS A CONTRADICTION IN WHAT YOU SAID.
WHAT IF YOU DIE WHILE MILORD IS STILL ALIVE?


BUT THE ART OF *SHINOBI* IS SOMETHING ELSE.
THE POSITION OF A GUARDIAN IS EASY TO FILL.
IF SO, THERE WILL BE NO SUCCESSOR WHO CAN PROTECT MILORD WITH *SHINOBI* TECHNIQUES.
BECAUSE IT DOESN'T REQUIRE ANY SPECIAL SKILL.

NOTHING BUT SMOKE CAN RAISE A CHILD TO TURN INTO SMOKE, DON'T YOU THINK?
A CHILD OF SMOKE CAN BECOME SMOKE.


LET YOUR CHILD BE BORN, HANZO!
FOR THE SAKE OF MILORD!
WITH SMOKE FOR A MOTHER, MY CHILD SHOULD GROW UP TO BE VERY GOOD SMOKE.
I WILL. TSUKUMO IS ALSO SMOKE.


THAT'S GOOD!
SMP
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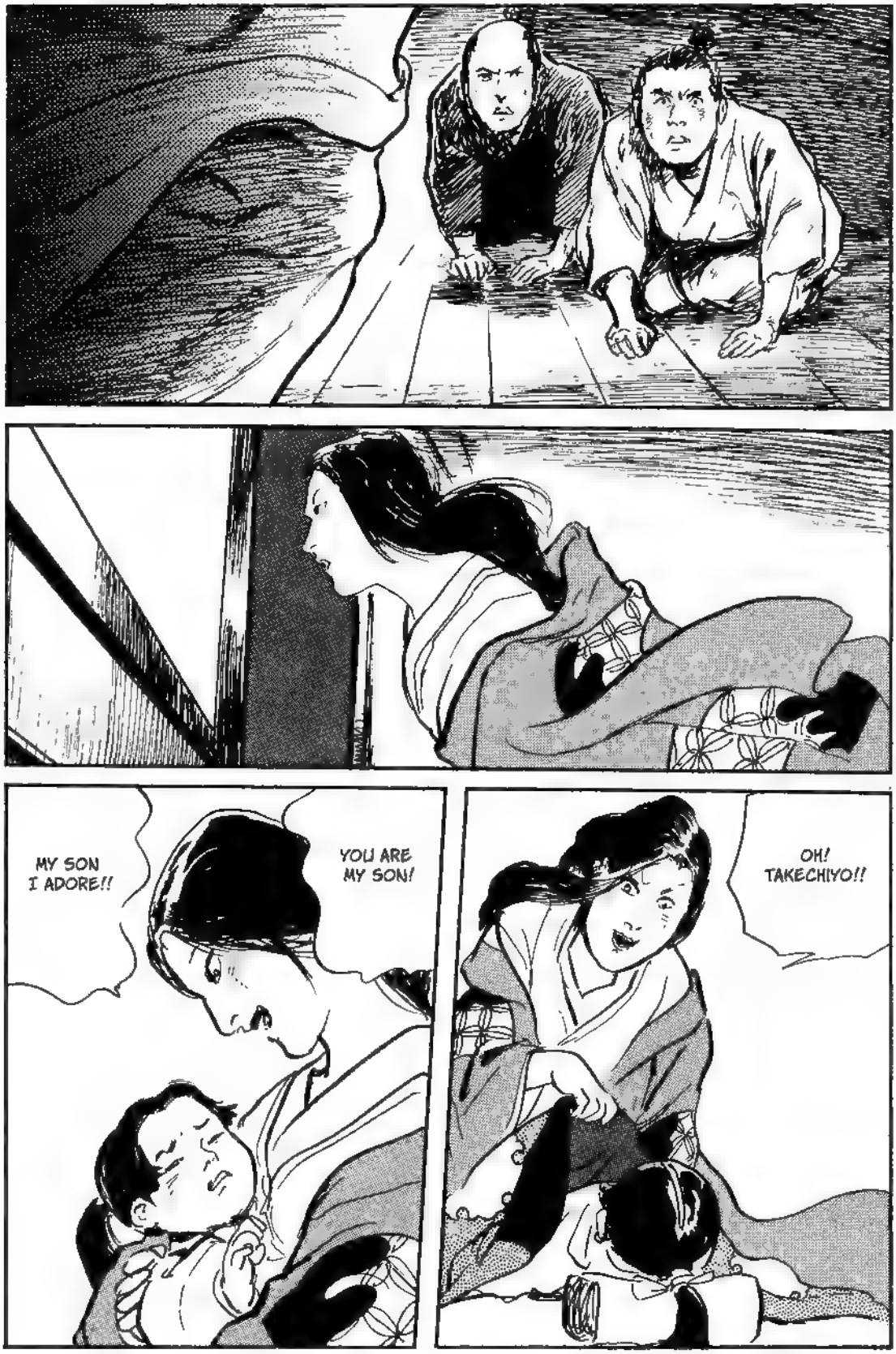

MY SON I ADORE!!
YOU ARE MY SON!
OH! TAKECHIYO!!

I WILL NEVER ACCEPT NOBUNAGA'S DAUGHTER!
I'M THE ONE WHO WILL CHOOSE YOUR WIFE!

I DID NOT MARRY INTO THIS CLAN! I MARRIED MOTONOBU-*DONO*, THE HOMELESS HOSTAGE OF IMAGAWA.
EVEN IF MIKAWA MATSUDAIRA IS DESTROYED BY MY CHOICE!

I WILL, FOR YOU, AS YOUR MOTHER!!
I WILL BLOCK NOBUNAGA'S SCHEME EVEN IF IT TEARS ME APART!
AND YOU ARE MY CHILD, NOT THIS CLAN'S.

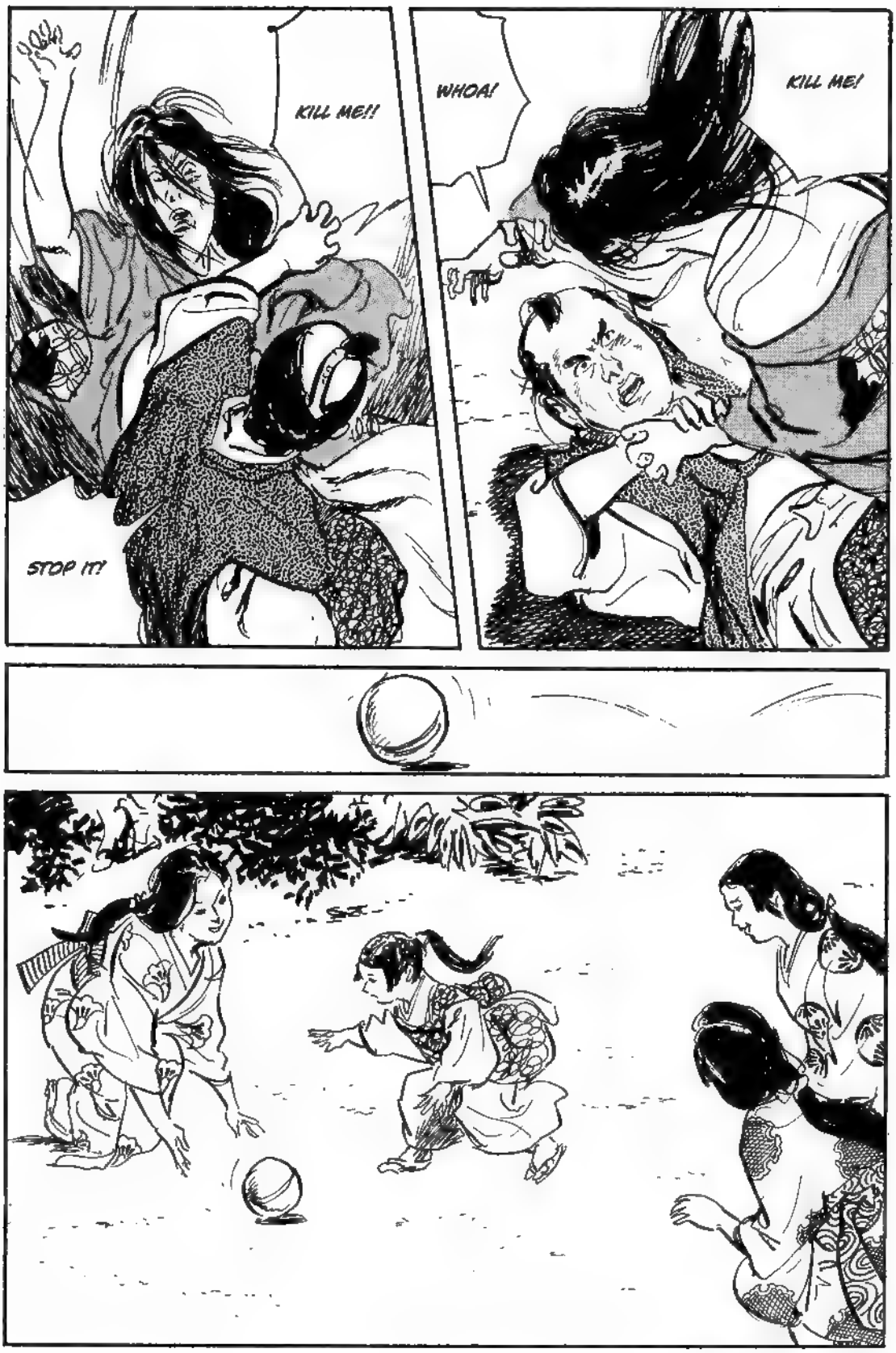
BUT IS THERE ANYONE HERE IN MIKAWA WHO SERVES MILADY?
I SERVE TAKECHIYO-SAMA, AND YOU SERVE MILORD.
IT'S TURNED INTO A HUGE PROBLEM.

TAKECHIYO-SAMA IS ALL SHE HAS. HOW SAD, BUT I UNDERSTAND HOW SHE FEELS.
I BET NO ONE DOES. THAT'S WHY TAKECHIYO-SAMA IS THE ONLY ONE SHE CAN COUNT ON.
SHE MUST THINK SHE CAN FINALLY COME OUT TO ENJOY THE SUNSHINE ONCE TAKECHIYO-SAMA GROWS UP AND, BOTH IN NAME AND IN REALITY, BECOMES THE LORD OF MIKAWA.

HE IS.
HE IS
ALL MINE!!
HAVE YOU LOST
YOUR MIND?!
TAKECHIYO ISN'T
ONLY YOURS
ALONE!
...I WAS THE ONE
WHO PROTECTED
TAKECHIYO'S LIFE!!
WHEN WE
WERE
IMAGAWA'S
HOSTAGES...
WHAAT?!

AREN'T THEY OUR ENEMY?!
NOW, ARE YOU TELLING ME IT WASN'T IMAGAWA THAT TRIED TO KILL TAKECHIYO?
THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT IT MEANS TO GIVE ONESELF AWAY!
THE REAL ENEMY WHO ATTEMPTED TO KILL TAKECHIYO IS HIS FATHER NAMED MATSUDAIRA MOTOYASU!!
HO HO HO HO HO. OUR ENEMY IS YOU!
BECAUSE YOU BETRAYED IMAGAWA, IT CAME TO THAT! BECAUSE YOU SIDED WITH ODA, DESERTING YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN, WE CAME VERY CLOSE TO BEING KILLED!!

BASH!
SLAP ME!
WHOA!
SLAP ME MORE!!


KILL ME!!
STOP IT!
WHOA!
KILL ME!

IT MUST BE PAINFUL FOR MILORD. I DOUBT HE'LL BE ABLE TO MOLLIFY MILADY.
A CHILD IS A STRANGE THING.
EVEN WITH YOUR *SHINOBI* TECHNIQUES, IT'S PROBABLY IMPOSSIBLE TO CALM THE DEMONS INSIDE A WOMAN'S HEART.
A FATHER CAN COVER HIS EYES AND AVOID SEEING HIS CHILD, BUT A MOTHER CAN NEVER DO THAT. I HEAR THAT MOTHERS NEVER FORGET THE PAIN OF LABOR.
A FATHER LOOKS AT HIS CHILD WITH HIS EYES, WHILE A MOTHER SEES HER CONNECTION TO HER CHILD THROUGH HER BODY.

BUT MAYBE A WOMAN IS NO LONGER A WOMAN AFTER SHE GIVES BIRTH.
A MAN IS A MAN UNTIL HE DIES.
はあ HAA
はあ HAA
はあ HAA
BE IT YOU, TAKECHIYO, OR I, NONE OF US CAN LIVE THEN!
IF... IF WE GO AGAINST ODA-*DONO* NOW, THE MIKAWA MATSUDAIRA CLAN WILL BE NO MORE!

WHA... WHAT KIND OF A WOMAN ARE YOU?!
...IT'S... IT'S BETTER THAT WE'RE ALL DEAD!!
SO WHAT?! RATHER THAN HAVING YOU SACRIFICE YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN...
DO... DO YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU?!
DO... DO YOU KNOW... HOW... HOW I PROTECTED TAKECHIYO... FROM THAT UJIZANE... WHO WAS IN A MANIACAL FRENZY...?
I BET... I BET... YOU ALREADY GUESSED!!

I LET UJIZANE SUCK ON THEM!
THESE... THESE BREASTS...
AND I... I LET HIM COME RIGHT IN HERE!

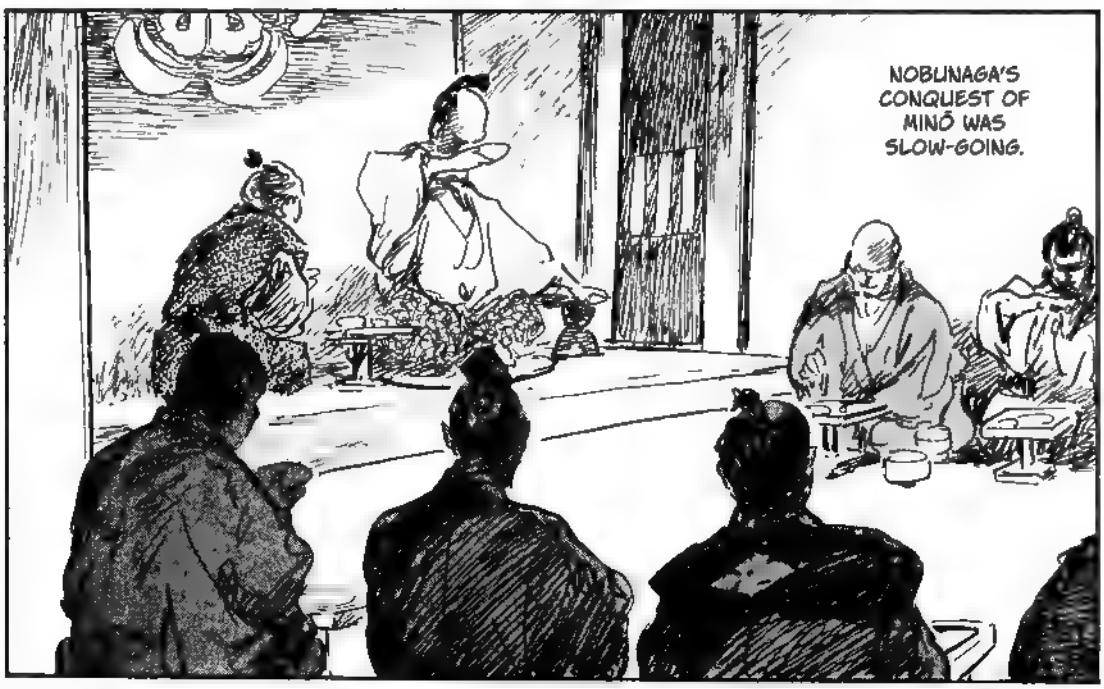
I SAID IT!!
THA... THAT'S HOW I PLEADED... TO SAVE TAKECHIYO'S LIFE!!
IT'S ALL OVER NOW!!
IT'S OVER!

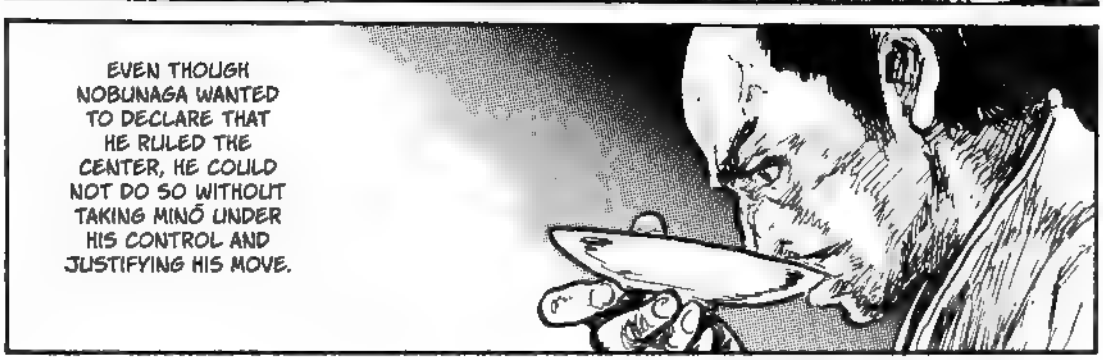
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.
HE'S YOUR FORMER LOVER!! I BET YOU WERE TURNED ON, IN FACT!
I'LL KILL TAKECHIYO AND COMMIT SUICIDE!

MOVE, MASANARI!!
IF IT IS A GIRL, I WOULD LIKE TO GIVE HER YOUR CHILDHOOD NAME. SO I BEG YOU ON MY KNEES.
TSUKUMO, MY WIFE, WILL HAVE A BABY.
HE TOLD YOU TO PRESENT YOURSELF AS TSUKIYAMA ONCE YOU BECAME A MAN'S WIFE.
MILADY, FROM WHAT I HEAR, THE LATE YOSHIMOTO-KŌ GAVE YOU YOUR CURRENT NAME.

TAKECHIYO-SAMA IS THE VERY CHILD FOR THAT!
TO BEAR CHILDREN FOR HŌSEI CHIKUZAN!!
HE WANTED YOU TO BEAR CHILDREN WHO'D BECOME YOUR MOUNTAIN AND HELP YOU HOLD THE STARS IN YOUR ARMS.
RECEIVING ODA'S PRINCESS IS ANOTHER STEP TOWARD BUILDING YOUR MOUNTAIN. WITHOUT PATIENCE, HOW CAN YOU EVER HOLD THE STARS?!

OWARI
KIYOSU CASTLE


NOBUNAGA'S CONQUEST OF MINŌ WAS SLOW-GOING.


EVEN THOUGH NOBUNAGA WANTED TO DECLARE THAT HE RULED THE CENTER, HE COULD NOT DO SO WITHOUT TAKING MINŌ UNDER HIS CONTROL AND JUSTIFYING HIS MOVE.

INABAYAMA CASTLE, IN WHICH TATSUOKI HAD ENTRENCHED HIMSELF, WAS A RENOWNED STRONGHOLD. IT MADE NOBUNAGA'S ATTACK INEFFECTIVE, ESPECIALLY SINCE HE WAS MOST SKILLED AT STRIKING FAST ON FLAT LAND.
BECAUSE HIS EXCUSE FOR ATTACKING TATSUOKI WAS TO AVENGE DOSAN, HIS FATHER-IN-LAW.
NOW THAT THE WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS ARE WORKED OUT WITH KATSUYORI, THE TIGER OF KAI IS PRETTY MUCH NAILED.
HAPPY, INDEED.
IT'S A HAPPY OCCASION.
CONGRATULATIONS, MILORD.
IT IS AUSPICIOUS.
AB-SOLUTELY, SIR.

THAT DAY, THE MARITAL UNION WAS ESTABLISHED BETWEEN KATSUYORI, THE SON OF TAKEDA SHINGEN OF KAI, AND NOBUNAGA'S ADOPTED DAUGHTER FROM TÖYAMA.
SHLOP
...WHETHER OR NOT NOBUNAGA GAVE AWAY HIS GIRL TO TAKEDA OF KAI, THE KEY WAS WHO LED THE ARMY TO THE CAPITAL--TO THE CENTER OF THE COUNTRY--AHEAD OF THE OTHERS.
BUT... HIDEYOSHI THOUGHT...
THE FIRST ONE TO MAKE HIS MOVE WOULD BE THE VICTOR. IF TAKEDA TOOK THE CAPITAL, THE CHANCES FOR NOBUNAGA WOULD BE GONE FOREVER.

IN FACT, MARRYING HIS ADOPTED DAUGHTER TO TAKEDA COULD BECOME A LIABILITY. THE MATRIMONY WAS ONLY MEANINGFUL IF ODA MOVED ON THE CAPITAL FIRST.
AND HIDEYOSHI GUESSED THIS WAS THE REASON WHY HIS MASTER WAS IN A FOUL MOOD. I GAVE TOKU TO TAKECHIYO OF MIKAWA. THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT NOW.
THAT'S ONLY TRUE... IF HE SUCCEEDS IN TAKING MINO,
BUT HE'S HAVING TROUBLE, AND THAT MEANS HE'LL RAGE AND RAVE TONIGHT...
...UNLESS SOMEONE SACRIFICES HIMSELF TO KEEP HIS MANIC DEPRESSION IN CHECK.

BALDY RAT!
AND THAT SOMEONE WOULD BE ME, I GUESS.
CAN'T YOU LOOK HAPPY AT LEAST A LITTLE?
DAMN YOU!
YES SIR.
YOU SOUR MY SAKE.

DON'T START AGAIN!
I BEG YOUR PARDON, BUT...
GET ON WITH IT!
ENOUGH ALREADY!
I BEG YOUR PARDON, BUT...
WHAAT?!
THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO SAY ABOUT THE TWO MARRIAGES.

I HAVE A FEELING THERE ISN'T ANY VALUE OR ADVANTAGE IN THEM.
BECAUSE, MILORD, I BELIEVE YOU INTEND TO DESTROY BOTH MIKAWA AND KAI ANYWAY.

STOP THAT! WHAT'RE YOU SAYING?!
H... HEY, KINOSHITA!
...YOU PLAN ON LEAVING THEM BOTH ALONE?
BUT, MAYBE, NOW THAT YOU GAVE YOUR DAUGHTERS TO THEM...
FINE. GO ON.
BE IT SHINGEN-SAMA OR IEYASU-SAMA, THEY ARE NOT AVERAGE WARLORDS.
IF THAT'S THE CASE, MILORD, YOU NO LONGER ASPIRE TO RULE THE COUNTRY.

...I CANNOT IMAGINE YOU'D THINK THAT TWO HEROES COULD SHARE THE GLORY--LET ALONE THREE OF YOU!!
THEY SAY NO TWO HEROES CAN SHARE GLORY. EVEN THOUGH THE MARRIAGES MAKE YOU RELATED...
AND THEY ARE WELL AWARE OF THAT THEMSELVES.
YOU'LL DEFINITELY HIT THEM SOMEDAY.
BAM

...WON'T HAVE HAPPY FUTURES.
...THE TWO PRINCESSES WHO MARRY...
AND IF THAT'S THE CASE...
GASHI
...IS AS THIN AS PAPER, IT SEEMS.
MILORD, YOUR AFFECTION FOR YOUR CHILDREN...

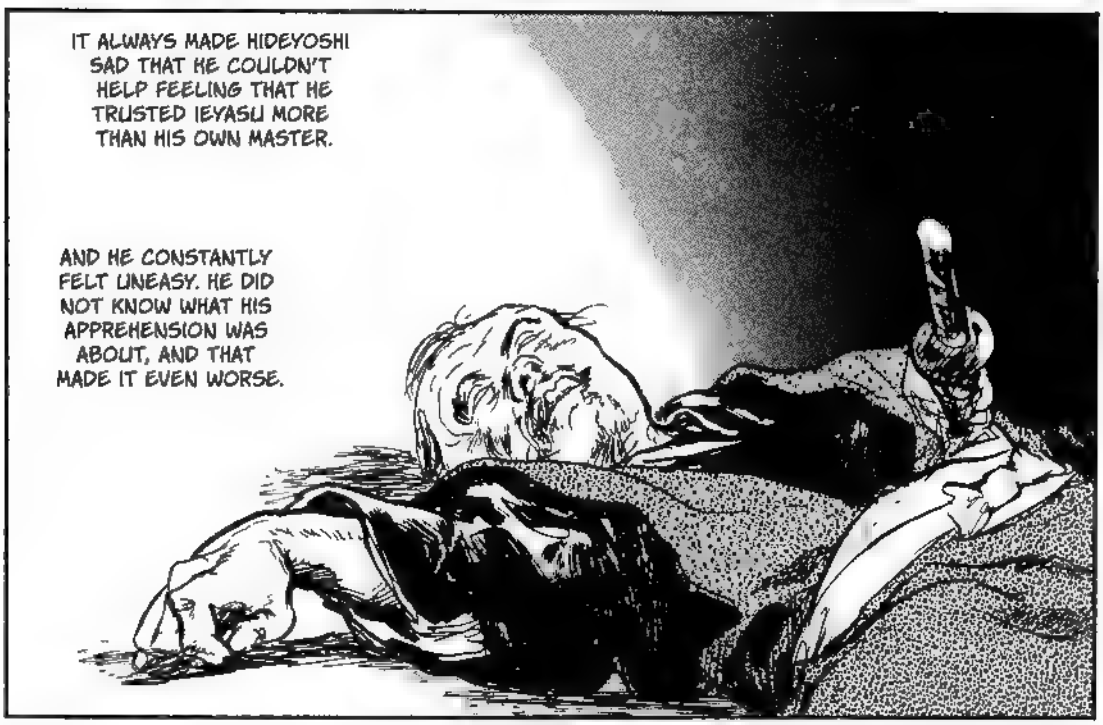
KRAKK

AND NOT ONLY THAT, IT'S AS IF YOU'RE FAWNING OVER TAKEDA AND MIKAWA

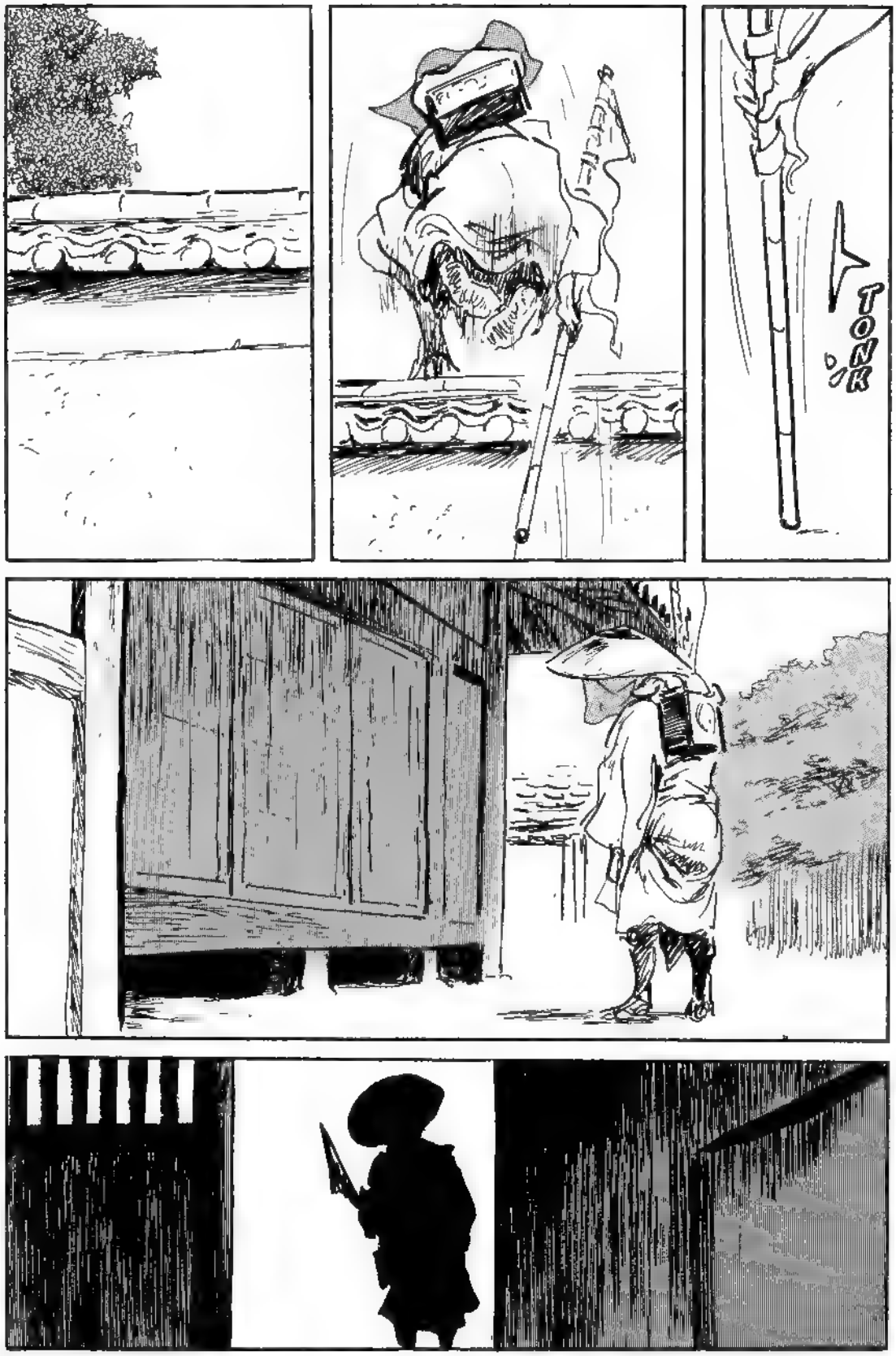
WHICH MEANS IT MAY BE YOU'VE ASKED TAKEDA TO WAIT UNTIL MINŌ FALLS, AND IN RETURN, YOU'RE GIVING YOUR DAUGHTER AWAY AS A BRIDE.
THAT ALSO SEEMS TO GO AGAINST YOUR NATURE.
BAM
SMASH
INSTEAD OF THIS STOP-GAP MEASURE, WHY NOT BE MORE DIGNIFIED...

PEOPLE LOSE THEIR TEMPER WHEN THEIR SECRET THOUGHTS ARE MERCILESSLY BROUGHT TO LIGHT.
BALDY RAT!! DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU ARE BEATEN?!
HA HA HA HA
UWA HA HA HA HA HA

BESIDES, HE WON'T BETRAY ME. AND THAT MEANS, I'M SENDING TOKU TO MIKAWA BECAUSE I TRULY ADORE HER.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
WE'LL STRIKE TAKEDA, BUT NOT MIKAWA. IEYASU IS LIKE A BROTHER TO ME.
YOU LIKE IEYASU THAT MUCH?
I... I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR. I KNEW YOU'D BATTER ME ANYWAY, SO I FIGURED I MIGHT AS WELL GET SOMETHING OUT OF IT.
YOU, BALDY RAT! I BET YOUR REAL INTENTION WAS TO GET THIS ANSWER OUT OF ME!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
I BELIEVE HE WILL BE YOUR ALLY FROM NOW ON IN THE WAY THAT A REAL BROTHER WOULD BE.


IT ALWAYS MADE HIDEYOSHI SAD THAT HE COULDN'T HELP FEELING THAT HE TRUSTED IEYASU MORE THAN HIS OWN MASTER.
AND HE CONSTANTLY FELT UNEASY. HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT HIS APPREHENSION WAS ABOUT, AND THAT MADE IT EVEN WORSE.

SNUFF
I SHOULD VISIT MIKAWA. IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I SAW HANZO...


TONK

AWW...
UHHH
AHHH

あぁぁぁ
AHHHH

N... NO MORE...

TSUKUMO, WE MIGHT HAVE A VISITOR.
I SENSE A PRESENCE, BUT NO THREAT.
NOW... WHO COULD IT BE?
HELLO!!

YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED YOURSELF.
SINCE WE LAST PARTED, YOU'VE GROWN A LITTLE OLD.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
YOU MEAN I'M ALREADY OLD, RIGHT?
DON'T SAY THAT.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
YOU GOT IT.

BUT WHAT AN AUSPICIOUS OCCASION IT IS.
I APOLOGIZE FOR MY SUDDEN VISIT.
BUT I ONLY FOUND OUT ABOUT IT JUST NOW.
IF I KNEW, I WOULD'VE BROUGHT SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE.
HERE!

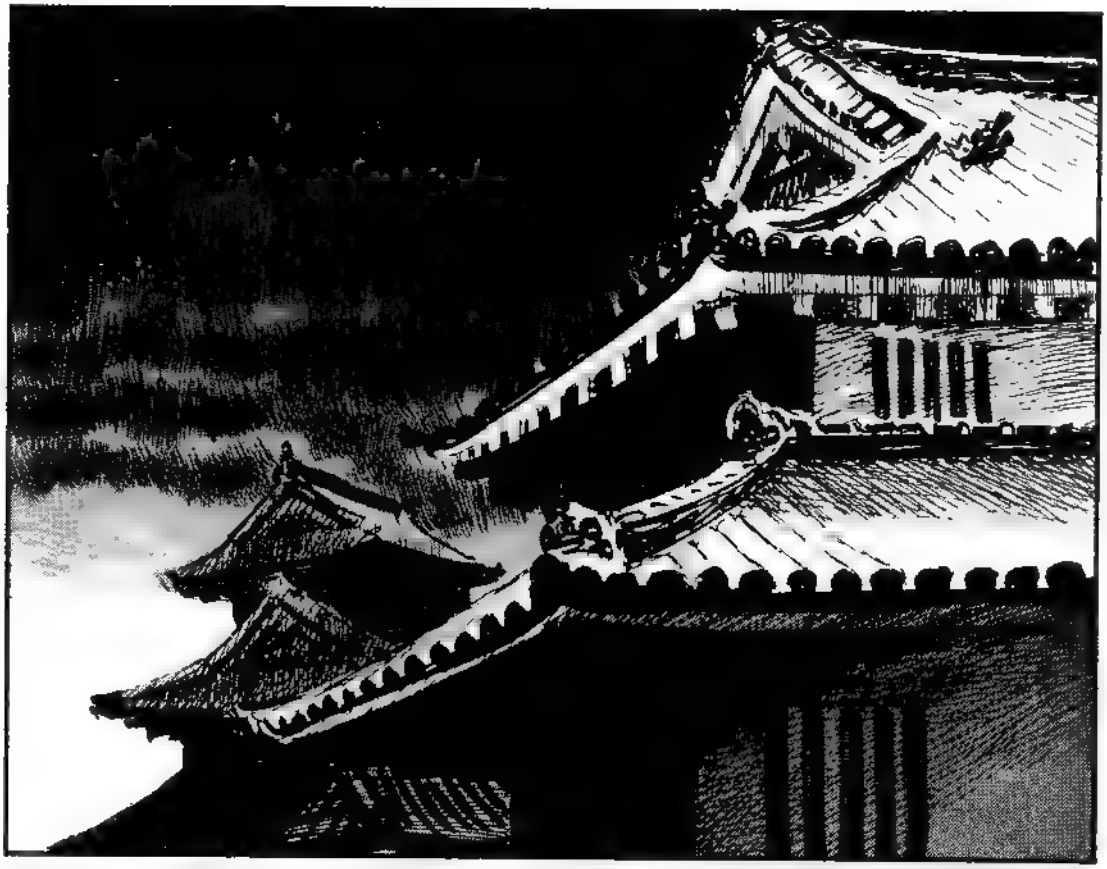
LET ME SING A SONG AND PRAY FOR EASY LABOR INSTEAD.
IT'S A PLUM TREE!!
IT FLOWERS AND BEARS FRUITS.

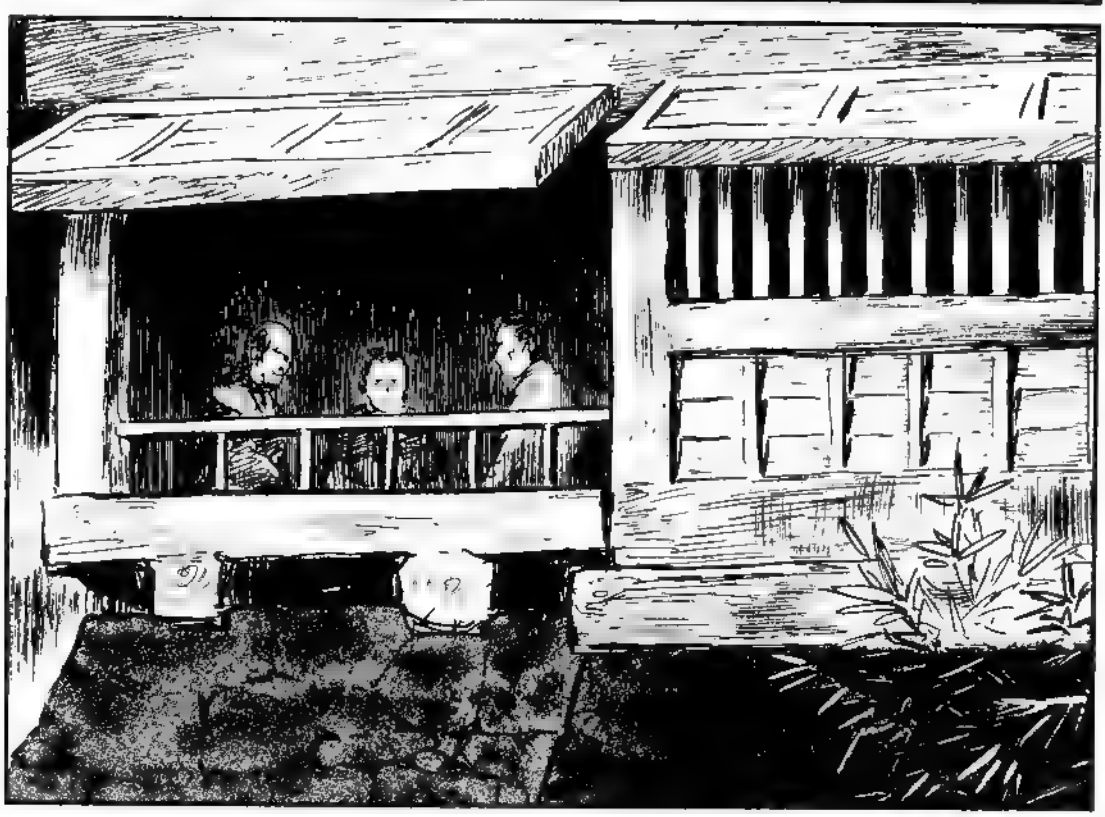
A WOMAN GIVES BIRTH...
...AND RAISES A STRONG CHILD TO CONTINUE THE BLOODLINE.
MY HUMBLE SONG FOR YOU.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH. THE PLUM TREE WITH THE DOUBLE MEANING FOR BIRTHING. IT'S A VERY WITTY SONG OF TRIBUTE, INDEED.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO NOTICE FROM THE WAY YOU PROTECTED THE BELLY WHILE YOU WERE AT IT.
IT WAS THE WAY YOU WERE MAKING LOVE.
I'M IMPRESSED. IT'S SOMETHING ONLY YOU CAN PULL OFF. BUT HOW DID YOU KNOW WE'RE EXPECTING A BABY? WHEN I HAVEN'T EVEN TOLD YOU ABOUT IT.
AS FOR ME, I CAN'T GET ANY. NO MATTER HOW I TRY.
I KNEW SOMEONE WAS LOOKING.
FOR ME THERE'S NO HINT OF A BABY.

THE FATE AWAITING A BOY IS WAR. WHAT AWAITS A GIRL IS POLITICAL MARRIAGE.
THIS ISN'T AN EXCUSE FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO IMPREGNATE A WOMAN. IT'S JUST THAT I BEGAN TO FEEL THAT WAY LATELY.
IN THIS ERA OF WARRING STATES, I'M NOT SURE IF IN FACT A BABY IS FORTUNATE TO BE BORN.
PLEASE FORGIVE ME.
WHAT A TERRIBLE THING I SAID.
OH NO.

I'VE COME TO VISIT TODAY BECAUSE I'M WORRIED ABOUT A FEW THINGS.
IT WOULD BE GOOD IF HE RAISED TAKECHIYO-*DONO* TO BE A FOOL. SO I'VE COME TO RECOMMEND THAT HE DOES THAT.
AND I HOPE YOU'LL INTRODUCE ME TO HIRAIWA CHIKAYOSHI-*DONO*.
?!





OH.
ONE TIME, I SPENT A WHOLE NIGHT THINKING ABOUT HOW WE COULD RID THE WORLD OF WAR COMPLETELY.
WELL, IT WAS WAY BACK WHEN I WAS TRAVELING AROUND JAPAN AS A NEEDLE PEDDLER.
GULP

WHEN THERE IS WAR, THE HEIR TO THE LORD MUST FIGHT FIRST. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF HE IS THREE OR TEN YEARS OLD.
WHAT IF EVERY FEUDAL LORD OF JAPAN SIGNS AN AGREEMENT?
THE LAST ONES TO FIGHT ARE THEIR SOLDIERS.
THEN THE FEUDAL LORDS THEMSELVES MUST FIGHT ONE-ON-ONE.
THE SOLDIERS WILL HAVE NO REASON TO FIGHT ONCE THEY LOSE THEIR LORD AND HIS HEIR. WITHOUT AN HEIR, THERE WILL BE NO LORD TO INHERIT THE CLAN.
IF THAT'S THE WAY IT IS, WAR WILL DISAPPEAR, I ASSURE YOU.

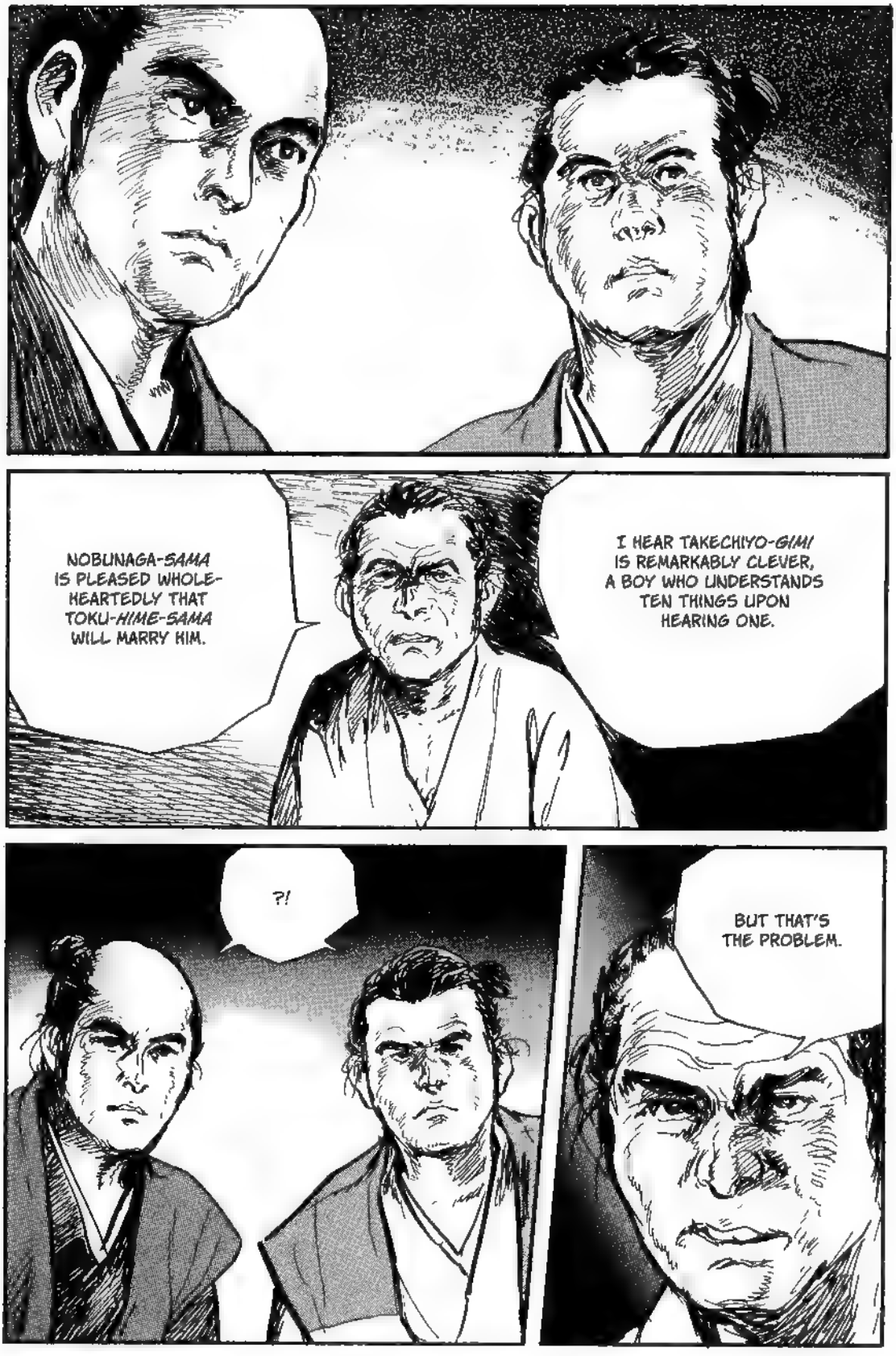
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA. IT'S RIDICULOUS.
I HEAR YOU SAID I SHOULD RAISE TAKECHIYO-*GIMI* TO BE A FOOL. I CANNOT LET A REMARK LIKE THAT PASS.
KINOSHITA-*DONO*.

I WILL. PLEASE PARDON ME IF I SAY ANYTHING RUDE.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY WANTING TO MEET ME FOR THAT REASON? PLEASE EXPLAIN.

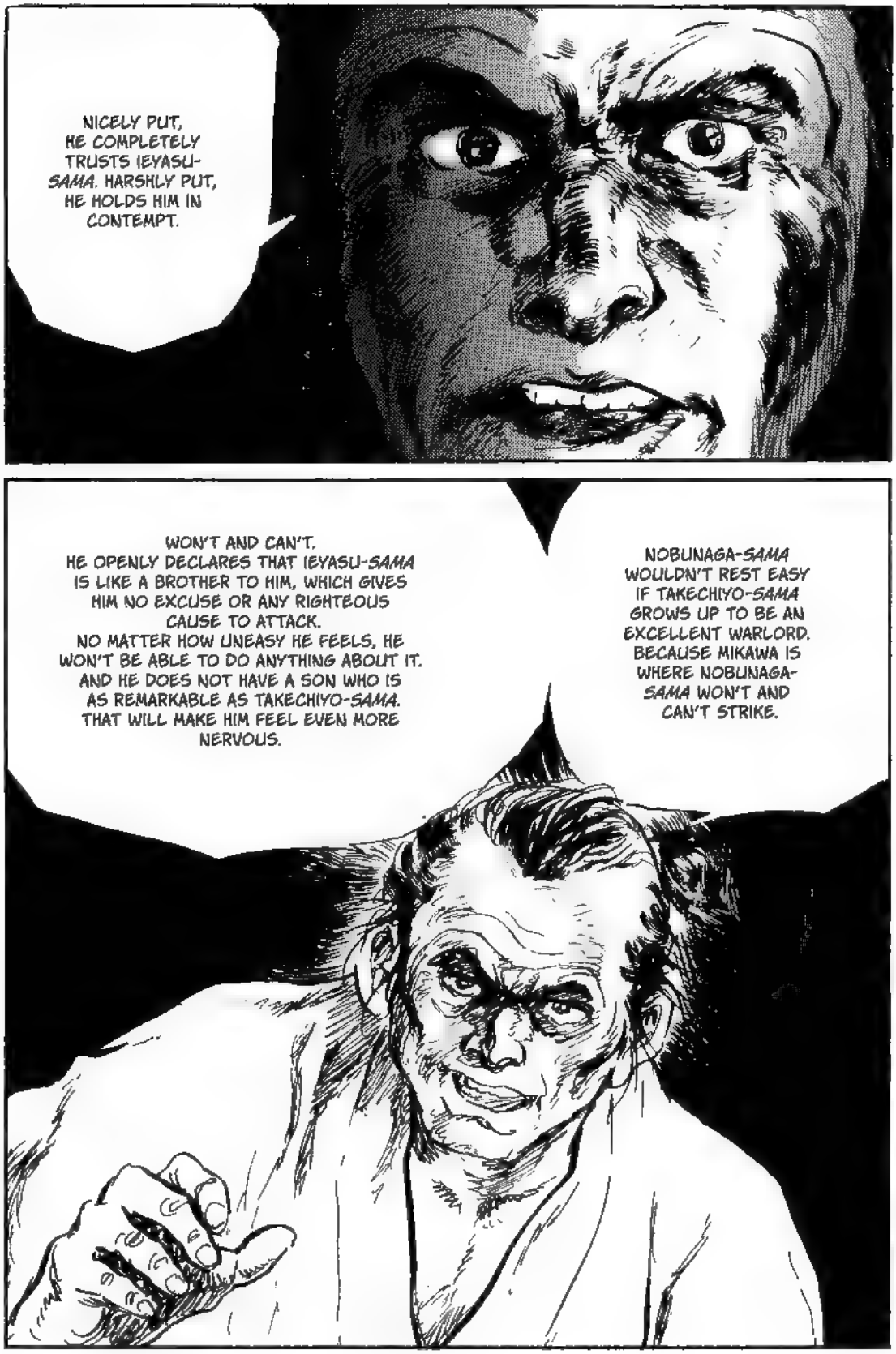
BY THE SEALING RITE, DO YOU MEAN THESE TO BE YOUR LAST WORDS?
IN SHINGON ESOTERIC BUDDHISM, THE SEALING RITE IS A TEACHING THAT CULTIVATES THE THREE ESOTERIC KEYS-- THAT IS, BODY, SPEECH, AND MIND.

WHEN THESE THREE ELEMENTS ARE UNITED, A MAN IS ABLE TO ATTAIN ENLIGHTENMENT IN HIS PRESENT EXISTENCE.
IF IT'S A *SHINOBI* WHO DOES THIS AFTER BEING DRIVEN INTO A CORNER, THAT'S ONE THING. BUT FOR KINOSHITA-*DONO*, A GENERAL OF ODA, TO DO IT-- THAT HAS TO MEAN HE IS PREPARED TO DIE, AND HE MEANS THESE TO BE HIS FINAL WORDS.
I WAS ALSO TRAINED AS *SUPPA*. I PERFORMED THE SEALING RITE TO CONVEY THAT WHAT I TELL YOU NOW IS NOT A LIE OR IDLE TALK.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
BUT IT'S TRUE--MY DAYS ARE NUMBERED, AFTER ALL.
YOU MUST KNOW HOW DIFFICULT AND DANGEROUS THAT IS.
BUILD A FORT ON SUNOMATA? THAT TINY ISLAND OF MUD?
FOR US TO TAKE DOWN MINŌ, WE NEED A FOOTHOLD IN SUNOMATA, AND I WILL BE THE ONE WHO HAS TO BUILD IT. THERE'S NO ONE ELSE WHO WOULD OR COULD BUILD A FORT THERE.
SO IT'S ALL RIGHT IF YOU THINK OF WHAT I'M GOING TO SAY AS MY DYING WORDS.


NOBUNAGA-SAMA IS PLEASED WHOLE-HEARTEDLY THAT TOKU-HIME-SAMA WILL MARRY HIM.
I HEAR TAKECHIYO-GIMI IS REMARKABLY CLEVER, A BOY WHO UNDERSTANDS TEN THINGS UPON HEARING ONE.
?!
BUT THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

EVER SINCE HE WAS LITTLE, EVERYONE AROUND HIM THOUGHT HE WAS STUPID. HE INTENTIONALLY MADE HIMSELF APPEAR THAT WAY, WHICH HELPED HIM BECOME WHO HE IS TODAY.
IT'S FINE WHILE HE IS STILL A BOY. BUT ONCE TAKECHIYO-*SAMA* GROWS UP, THE MORE EXCELLENT HE TURNS OUT AS A WARLORD, THE MORE NERVOUS NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* IS LIKELY TO BECOME.
IT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND IF YOU LOOK BACK AT NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* HIMSELF AS AN EXAMPLE.
AND THAT'S WHY HE CAN SEND TOKU-*HIME*-*SAMA* WITH HIS HEART AT REST.
WHEN THE MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENT WAS MADE WITH TAKEDA OF KAI THE OTHER DAY, NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* SAID TO ME CLEARLY...
...THAT HE WOULD STRIKE TAKEDA SOMEDAY, BUT NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FUTURE, HE WOULD NEVER ATTACK MIKAWA.
IN SHORT, HE REGARDS MIKAWA AS PART OF HIS OWN TERRITORY.


NICELY PUT, HE COMPLETELY TRUSTS IEYASU-SAMA. HARSHLY PUT, HE HOLDS HIM IN CONTEMPT.
WON'T AND CAN'T. HE OPENLY DECLARES THAT IEYASU-SAMA IS LIKE A BROTHER TO HIM, WHICH GIVES HIM NO EXCUSE OR ANY RIGHTEOUS CAUSE TO ATTACK. NO MATTER HOW UNEASY HE FEELS, HE WON'T BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. AND HE DOES NOT HAVE A SON WHO IS AS REMARKABLE AS TAKECHIYO-SAMA. THAT WILL MAKE HIM FEEL EVEN MORE NERVOUS.
NOBUNAGA-SAMA WOULDN'T REST EASY IF TAKECHIYO-SAMA GROWS UP TO BE AN EXCELLENT WARLORD. BECAUSE MIKAWA IS WHERE NOBUNAGA-SAMA WON'T AND CAN'T STRIKE.

SO HE WILL SHIFT HIS FOCUS TO TAKECHIYO-SAMA'S BLOOD. THERE'S NO DOUBT.

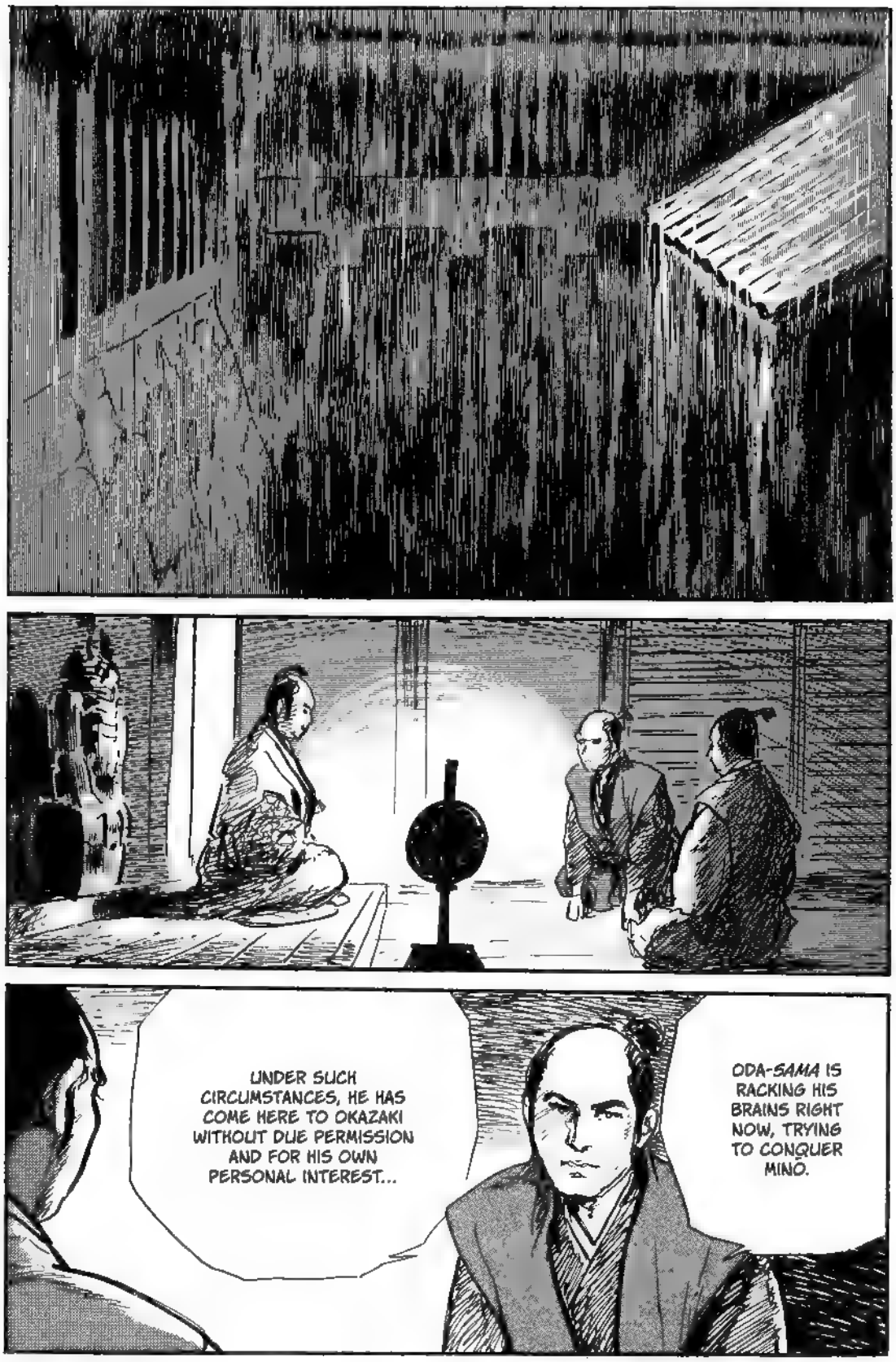
I CAN ALMOST SEE IT--THE FUTURE OF TAKECHIYO-SAMA.
TAKECHIYO-SAMA HAS IMAGAWA IN HIM.

I REFUSE.
THAT'S WHY I RECOMMEND THAT YOU RAISE HIM STUPID.

BUT YOU MUST KNOW, NOBUNAGA-SAMA HAD TO ACT STUPID BECAUSE EVEN AT HOME, EVERYONE AROUND HIM WAS HIS ENEMY.
I VERY MUCH APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERNS.
TAKECHIYO-GIMI, ON THE OTHER HAND, ISSURROUNDED BY ALLIES. IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, WE OURSELVES WILL STRIKE OWARI FIRST.
INDEED, LOYAL VASSALS CAN'T SEE THE FUTURE.
I KNEW YOU'D SAY THAT.

MY OWN
WHOSE VASSAL ARE YOU YOURSELF?!
UNLIKE YOU, I AM A MAN WHO CHOSE MY OWN MASTER
THE REASON I PICKED NOBUNAGA-SAMA IS BECAUSE I HAD FAITH IN HIS ABILITY

IN OTHER WORDS, I THOUGHT HE WOULD SURVIVE THE CIVIL WAR.
AND IF SO, BY SERVING HIM, I WOULD BE ABLE TO SURVIVE TOO.
THAT'S WHY I CONSIDER MYSELF A VASSAL OF MY OWN LIFE.
OTHERWISE, I WOULDN'T BE HERE TO LEAVE MY DYING WORDS.
IF I WERE A CLANSMAN LIKE YOU, I WOULD BE IN OWARI RIGHT NOW.
I LIKE IEYASU-SAMA, THAT'S ALL.


UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, HE HAS COME HERE TO OKAZAKI WITHOUT DUE PERMISSION AND FOR HIS OWN PERSONAL INTEREST...
ODA-*SAMA* IS RACKING HIS BRAINS RIGHT NOW, TRYING TO CONQUER MINO.

YES, SIR.
HE SAID IT'S BECAUSE HE LIKES ME?
NOT ONLY THAT, HE RECOMMENDS THAT WE RAISE TAKECHIYO-*SAMA* TO BE A FOOL. AT THIS POINT, I'M AT A LOSS. I CANNOT FATHOM HIS TRUE INTENTION.
I'D IMAGINE IT'S NOT TO BE MENTIONED THOUGHTLESSLY.
THAT, TOO, IS ODA'S SECRET.
HM.
A FORT... ON SUNOMATA, HUH?
HE EVEN SHEDS TEARS AT TIMES-- LIKE THE LAST TIME WE MET.
WELL, HE TELLS ME EVERYTHING WITHOUT RESERVATION.

HE'S A LONELY, SELF-MADE MAN.
HE IS A VASSAL OF ODA. WHY DOES HE DO THAT?
BUT HE IS OF LOWLY BIRTH. THE HIGHER HE RISES, THE MORE PEOPLE AROUND HIM BECOME HIS ENEMIES.
ODA CLANSMEN ARE ESPECIALLY PICKY ABOUT THEIR POSITIONS AND BIRTHS. HE IS THE ONLY MAN WHO HAS RISEN AS HIGH AS HE DID BASED SOLELY ON HIS OWN MERIT.
THUS, WHATEVER HE DOES, HE PROBABLY DOES IT ALONE. I DOUBT IF HE HAS ANY CLOSE FRIENDS.

HE IS LIKE ME.
IN FACT, HE MIGHT THINK OF YOU AND I AS HIS FRIENDS TO WHOM HE CAN OPEN HIS HEART.
AS A HOSTAGE, I WAS FORCED TO LIVE WITHOUT REVEALING MY FEELINGS FOR A LONG TIME. EVEN THOUGH OUR SITUATIONS ARE DIFFERENT, I CAN UNDERSTAND HIS FEELINGS PAINFULLY WELL.
YES, SIR.
LET HIM IN.
AND ABOUT HOW HE LIKES ME... IF YOU CONNECT THESE THREE POINTS, YOU HAVE THE ANSWER TO WHY HE CAME.
ABOUT HOW TO RAISE TAKECHIYO...
ABOUT BUILDING A FORT ON SUNOMATA...

I AM HAPPY TO SEE YOU IN GOOD HEALTH TOO.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I SAW YOU LAST. I AM VERY GLAD TO FIND YOU IN GOOD HEALTH. FURTHERMORE, IEYASU-*SAMA*, EVEN THOUGH I WASN'T SURPRISED, I WAS DELIGHTED THAT YOU SUCCESSFULLY REPRESSED THE *IKKŌ IKKI*.
YOU'RE SAYING YOU WILL PROTECT TAKECHIYO IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, AND IN EXCHANGE, YOU WANT ME TO ASSIST YOU IN BUILDING THE FORT ON SUNOMATA. IS THAT IT?
NOW, LET ME BE FRANK.

NO MATTER WHO ATTEMPTS IT, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
I KNEW YOU'D UNDERSTAND.
BY THE TIME MY TURN COMES AROUND, NO ONE WILL CARE IF I SUCCEED, AND THEY'LL GIVE ME ONLY A FEW MEN TO WORK WITH.
IN SHORT, THEY'LL MAKE ME TAKE THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAILING TO BUILD A FORT.
SUNOMATA OFFERS REAL ADVANTAGES TO THE MINO FORCES. IT'S NOT THE KIND OF PLACE ODA CAN ERECT A FORT.
ANYWAY, THE TASK WILL FIRST BE ASSIGNED TO A FAMOUS GENERAL OF ODA. IF HE FAILS, THE NEXT IN LINE WILL BE ANOTHER GENERAL NOTED FOR HIS VALOR.
SO FOR ME TO SURVIVE, I MUST BUILD THE FORT ON SUNOMATA NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.

YES. IF YOU WOULD LOAN ME THE IGA FOLK UNDER HATTORI HANZO MASANARI-DONO'S CONTROL.
BUT . DO YOU HAVE ANY PROSPECT OF SUCCESS?
IF YOU CAN'T, I UNDERSTAND I JUST HAD TO ASK BECAUSE I KNOW MY DAYS ARE NUMBERED
HMMM.
BESIDES, TO TELL THE TRUTH, I'VE COME TO SAY MY LAST FAREWELL.

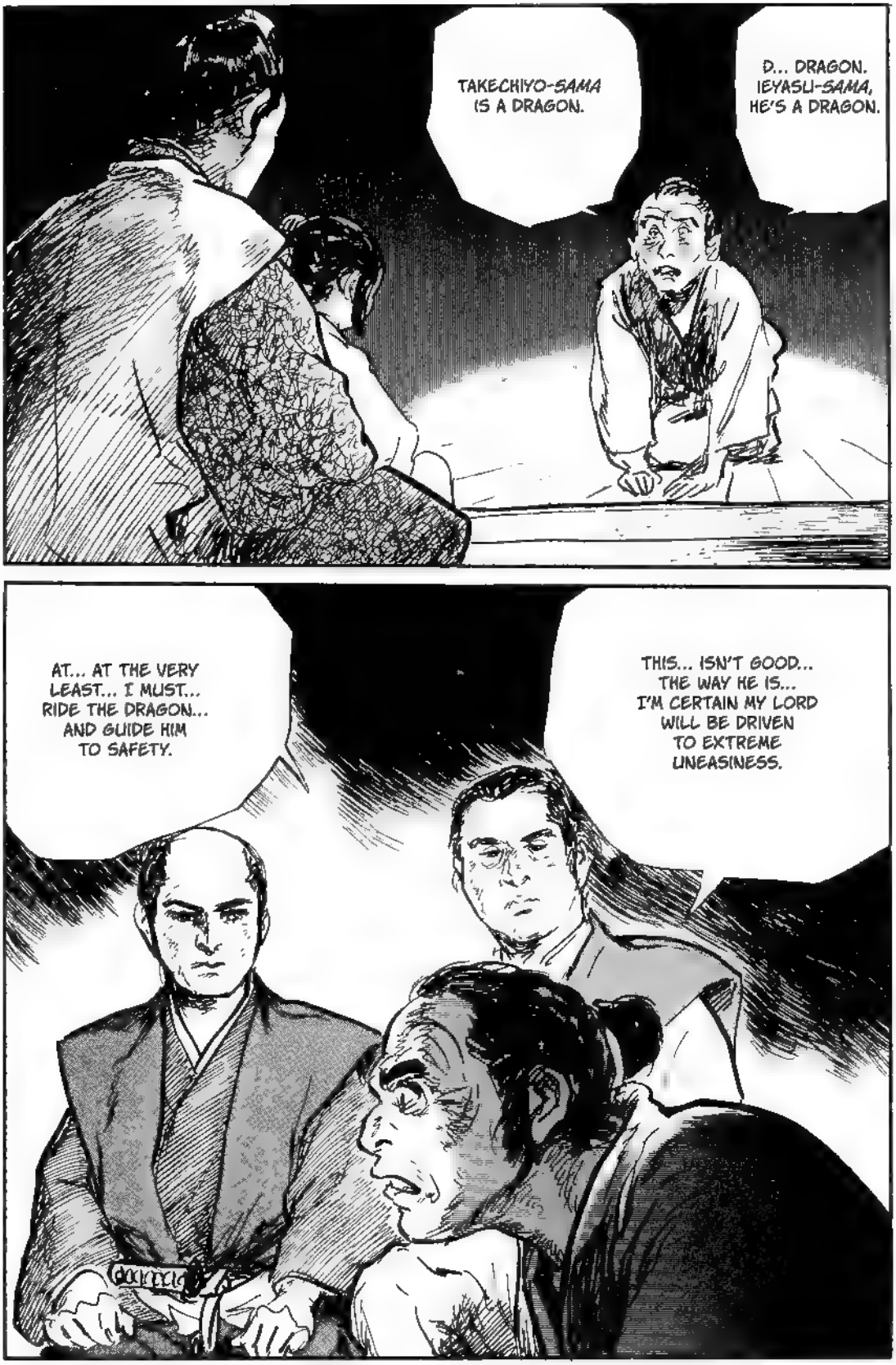
IF I DO, MY VASSALS WILL CENSURE ME FOR BEING TOO SERVILE TO OWARI. SO IF ANYTHING HAPPENS...
I AM APPREHENSIVE ABOUT TAKECHIYO MYSELF. EVEN SO, I CANNOT HAVE HIM RAISED TO BE A FOOL.
IF I'M ALIVE, I WILL GIVE MY LIFE TO PROTECT HIM.
..I WILL COUNT ON YOUR HELP.

YES, SIR.
HANZŌ. WHEN THE TIME COMES, GO TO SUNOMATA.
TH... THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
YES!
PLEASE MEET TAKECHIYO BEFORE YOU GO.

TAKECHIYO-*SAMA*, PLEASE REMEMBER ME AS HIDEYOSHI, THE MONKEY MAN.
HE IS KINOSHITA-*DONO* OF THE ODA CLAN. HE SAYS HE WILL BE OF HELP TO YOU IN THE FUTURE.

HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
MONKEYS ARE GOOD.

BUT MONKEYS CAN RUN THE EARTH AND CLIMB AS HIGH AS FLYING IN THE SKY.
BIRDS CANNOT RUN ON THE GROUND, AND BEASTS CANNOT FLY.
YOU MUST BE VERY GOOD AT WAR.
I LIKE MONKEYS.


TAKECHIYO-SAMA IS A DRAGON.
D... DRAGON. IEYASU-SAMA, HE'S A DRAGON.
AT... AT THE VERY LEAST... I MUST... RIDE THE DRAGON... AND GUIDE HIM TO SAFETY.
THIS... ISN'T GOOD... THE WAY HE IS... I'M CERTAIN MY LORD WILL BE DRIVEN TO EXTREME UNEASINESS.

WHO... WHO WOULD'VE GUESSED... HOW CLEVER... HE IS...
IT WAS AS IF TAKECHIYO'S SHARPNESS ALONE WAS SLASHING OUT... AND IT MADE HIDEYOSHI'S HEART TREMBLE.
THE BOY DID NOT HAVE THE GENTLENESS OF IEYASU, NOR DID HE EXHIBIT THE SWEETNESS OF A CHILD.

FURTHERMORE...
HIDEYOSHI COULD SENSE THE BLOOD OF IMAGAWA FLOWING IN THE BOY AS IF YOSHIMOTO POSSESSED HIM.
THIS ISN'T GOOD.
...THE BOY LACKED WHAT ALL CHILDREN HAVE IN COMMON. THAT IS, A SENSE OF VULNERABILITY WHICH INDUCES ADULTS TO EXTEND A HELPING HAND. THE YOUNGER THE CHILD IS, THE STRONGER IT IS USUALLY FELT.
BUT LIKE SMOKE, THERE WAS NO SUCH VULNERABILITY IN TAKECHIYO.

# Chapter On Jōsha Hissui

## No. 3: Commander's Saihai

YES?
URM, HANZÖ-SA.

WHAT?!
DO YOU KNOW HOW BIG IEYASU-SAMA'S WAR CHEST IS?

WHO KNOWS?
HE MUST HAVE 200 KAN OF GOLD AT THE VERY LEAST, I IMAGINE.
?!
DO YOU THINK HE WOULD LOAN ME SOME OF THAT?
I'M THINKING OF BUYING MUSKETS WITH THE MONEY.

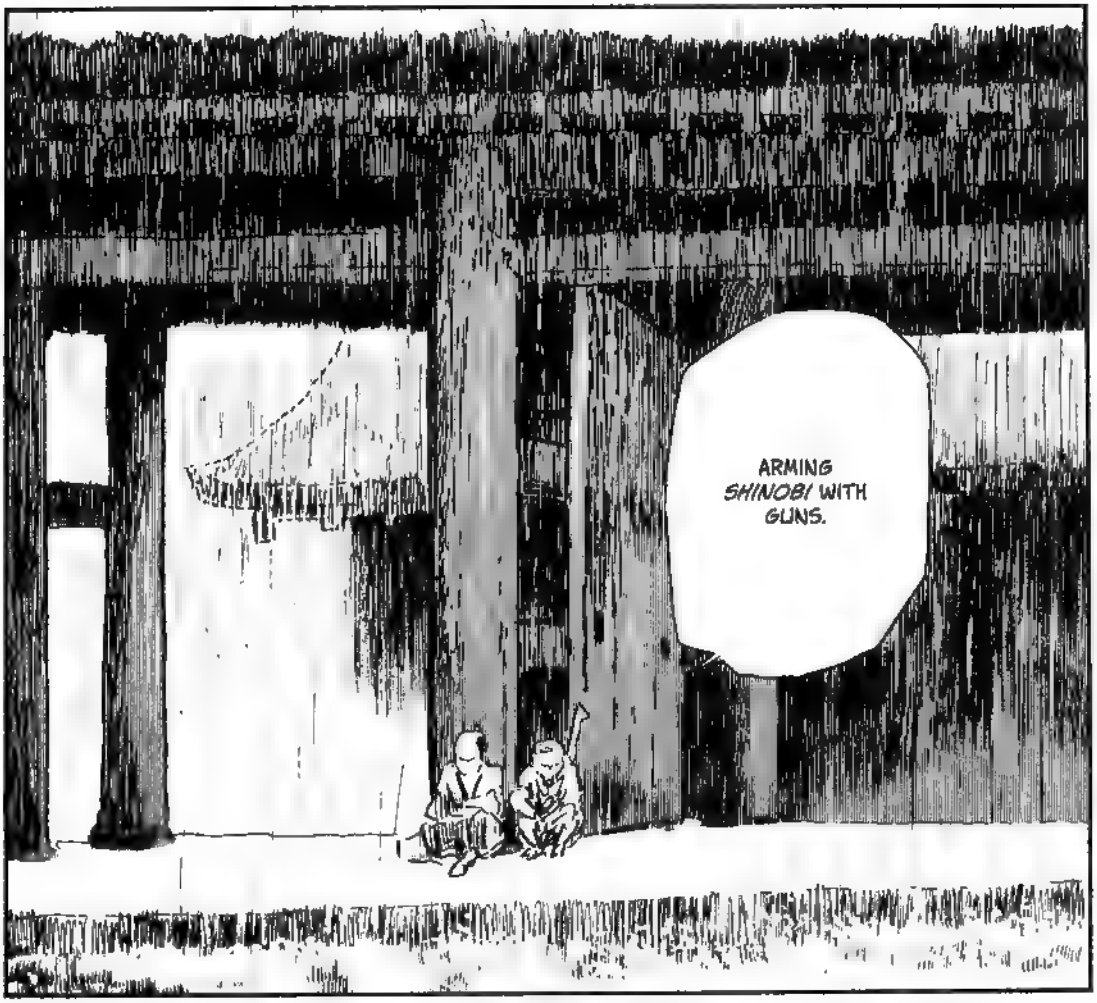
YOU'RE NOT SERIOUS ABOUT THIS, ARE YOU?
WILL YOU TALK TO IEYASU-*SAMA* ABOUT IT?
?!
IT'S NOT ME WHO'S GOING TO TOUCH THE MONEY OR THE GUNS. IT'S YOU, HANZŌ-*SA*.

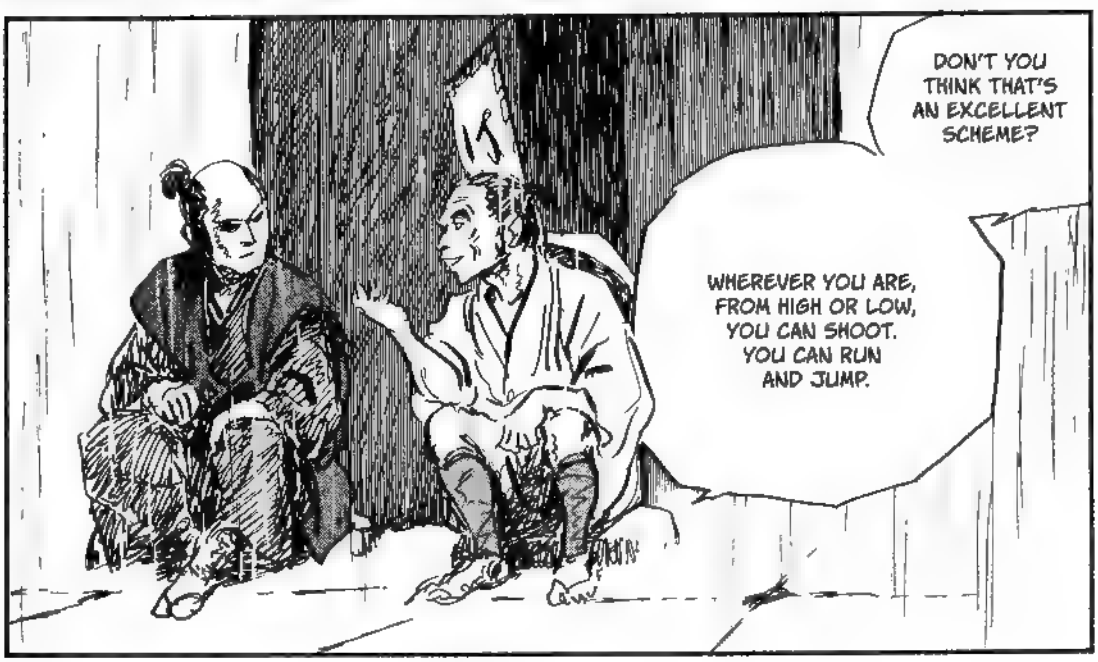
I WILL ARRANGE THE PURCHASE.

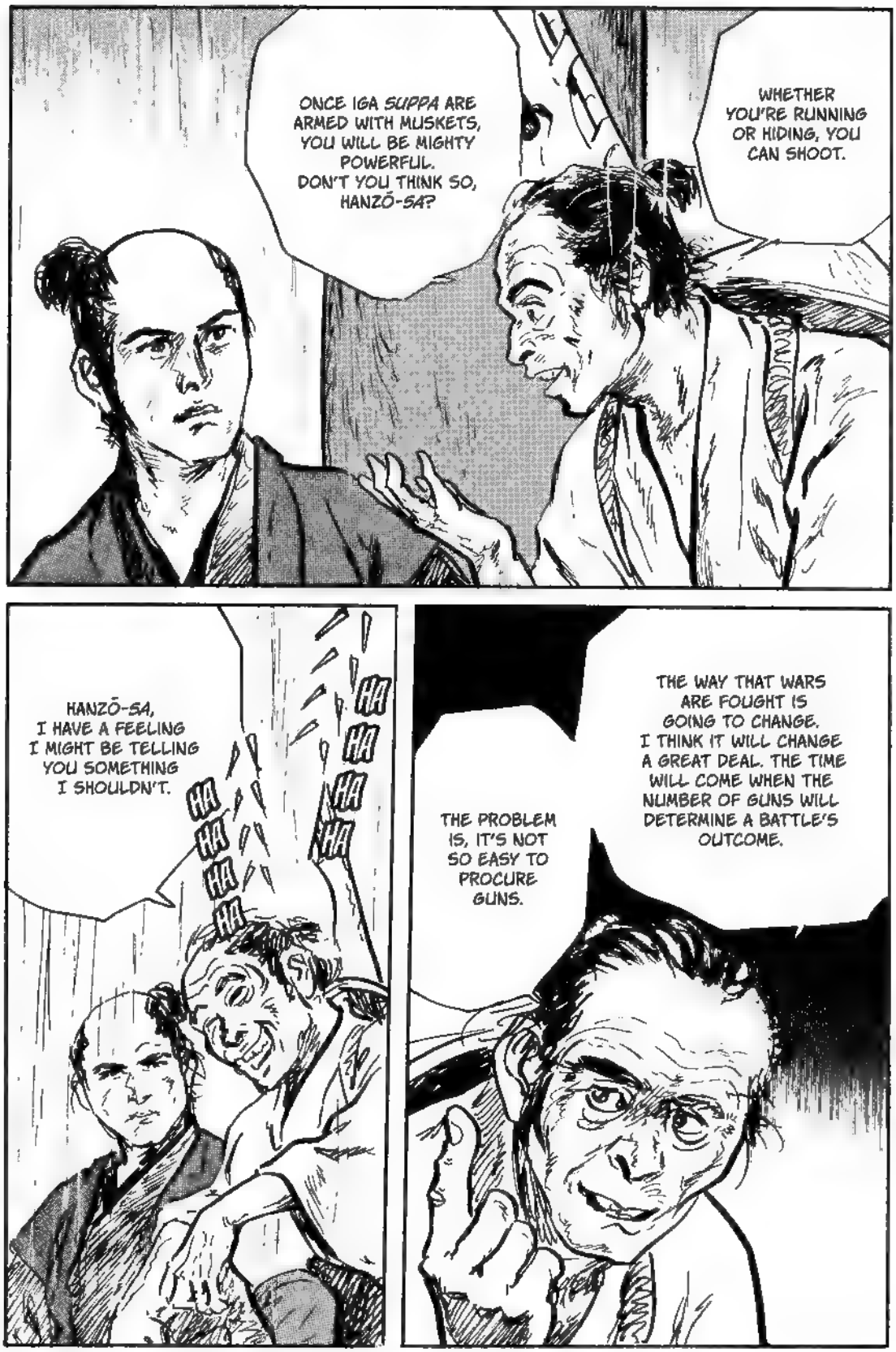
HANZŌ-SA, YOU WILL COME ALONG WITH THE MONEY AND BUY THE MUSKETS.

IF THE MEN OF IGA COME TO SUNOMATA WITH GUNS IN THEIR ARMS, I WON'T HAVE TO DIE, YOU SEE?
?!

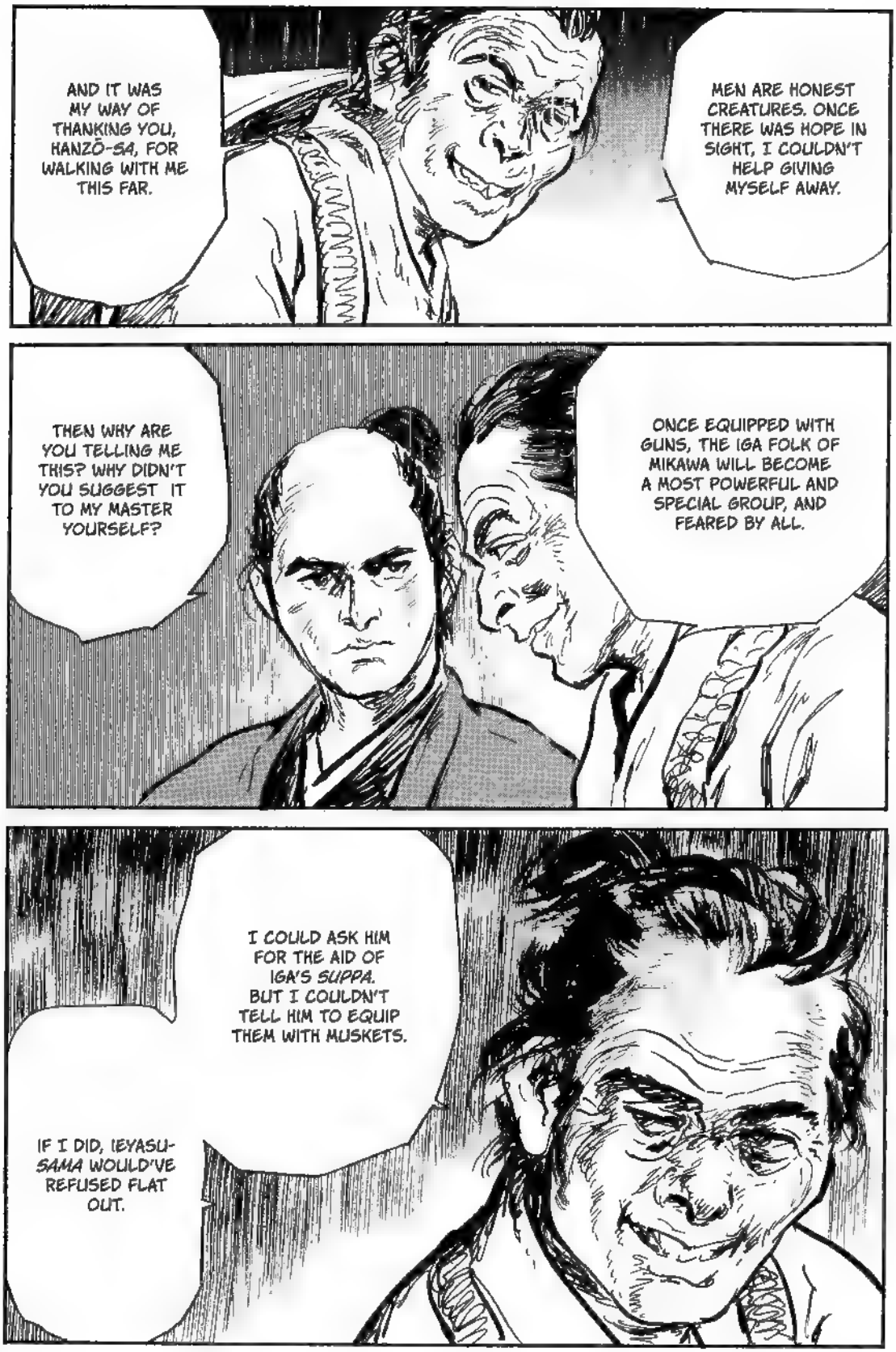
WHEN WE FIGHT THE MINŌ FORCES AT SUNOMATA, THE ONLY WAY TO PUT THEM TO ROUT IS TO HAVE *SHINOBI* FIRE AT THEM.
HMMM!
IN ADDITION TO A HUNDRED OF YOU FROM IGA, I WILL HAVE FIFTY *SUPPA* UNDER ME. IF A HUNDRED AND FIFTY GUNS BARRAGE THE MINŌ FORCES, I THINK EVEN THEY WOULD BE QUITE HELPLESS.
AFTER ALL, YOU FOLKS CAN SEE FAR AND IN THE DARK.
AND THAT'S MY HOPE FOR SUCCESS, YOU SEE.


ARMING *SHINOBI* WITH GUNS.


DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S AN EXCELLENT SCHEME?
WHEREVER YOU ARE, FROM HIGH OR LOW, YOU CAN SHOOT. YOU CAN RUN AND JUMP.


ONCE IGA *SUPPA* ARE ARMED WITH MUSKETS, YOU WILL BE MIGHTY POWERFUL. DON'T YOU THINK SO, HANZŌ-*SA*?
WHETHER YOU'RE RUNNING OR HIDING, YOU CAN SHOOT.
HANZŌ-*SA*, I HAVE A FEELING I MIGHT BE TELLING YOU SOMETHING I SHOULDN'T.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
THE PROBLEM IS, IT'S NOT SO EASY TO PROCURE GUNS.
THE WAY THAT WARS ARE FOUGHT IS GOING TO CHANGE. I THINK IT WILL CHANGE A GREAT DEAL. THE TIME WILL COME WHEN THE NUMBER OF GUNS WILL DETERMINE A BATTLE'S OUTCOME.

I WAS SO HAPPY.
MMMM.
WHY DID YOU THEN?!
IT'S SOMETHING THAT MIGHT LEAD TO ODA'S DEFEAT IF ODA AND TOKUGAWA EVER FIGHT EACH OTHER!
HONESTLY, I'VE COME TO MIKAWA THINKING THIS IS THE LAST TIME.
I AM ODA'S VASSAL AFTER ALL. SO I NEVER THOUGHT IEYASU-*SAMA* WOULD LOAN HIS IGA *SUPPA* TO ME--NO, NOT EVEN HE WOULD.
NOT EVEN WITH MY PROMISE TO PROTECT TAKECHIYO-*SAMA*.
BUT QUITE UNEXPECTEDLY, HE CONSENTED WILLINGLY.
HE SHOWED A LIGHT TO A MAN WHO THOUGHT HE WOULDN'T LIVE TO SEE HIM AGAIN. HE MADE ME WANT TO LIVE.


AND IT WAS MY WAY OF THANKING YOU, HANZŌ-SA, FOR WALKING WITH ME THIS FAR.
MEN ARE HONEST CREATURES. ONCE THERE WAS HOPE IN SIGHT, I COULDN'T HELP GIVING MYSELF AWAY.
THEN WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS? WHY DIDN'T YOU SUGGEST IT TO MY MASTER YOURSELF?
ONCE EQUIPPED WITH GUNS, THE IGA FOLK OF MIKAWA WILL BECOME A MOST POWERFUL AND SPECIAL GROUP, AND FEARED BY ALL.
I COULD ASK HIM FOR THE AID OF IGA'S *SUPPA*. BUT I COULDN'T TELL HIM TO EQUIP THEM WITH MUSKETS.
IF I DID, IEYASU-*SAMA* WOULD'VE REFUSED FLAT OUT.

A DEMAND LIKE THAT HAS TO COME FROM A COMMANDER.
SO IF I WERE TO ASK IT, THE LORD OF ODA WOULD HAVE TO BE BEHIND ME. DON'T YOU AGREE?
I MIGHT BE CLOSE TO IEYASU-SAMA--CLOSE ENOUGH TO REQUEST HIS MEN'S HELP. BUT I'M NOT IN A POSITION TO ASK HIM TO LEND ME HIS WEAPONS MYSELF.
SO... I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE PERFECT IF YOU, HANZŌ-SA, WOULD RELAY THIS IDEA TO IEYASU-SAMA.
WITHOUT EVEN HINTING AT WHERE THE IDEA CAME FROM, BUT INSTEAD, PRESENT IT AS YOUR OWN SUGGESTION.

THAT'S WHAT I HAD IN MIND.
I'LL SEE YOU IN SUNOMATA THEN.
WELL, I'D BETTER GO.

...THE STATE I'VE BEEN LEFT IN, THOUGHT HANZŌ.
OPEN-MOUTHED AND SPEECHLESS.
THESE ARE THE WORDS THAT PERFECTLY DESCRIBE...

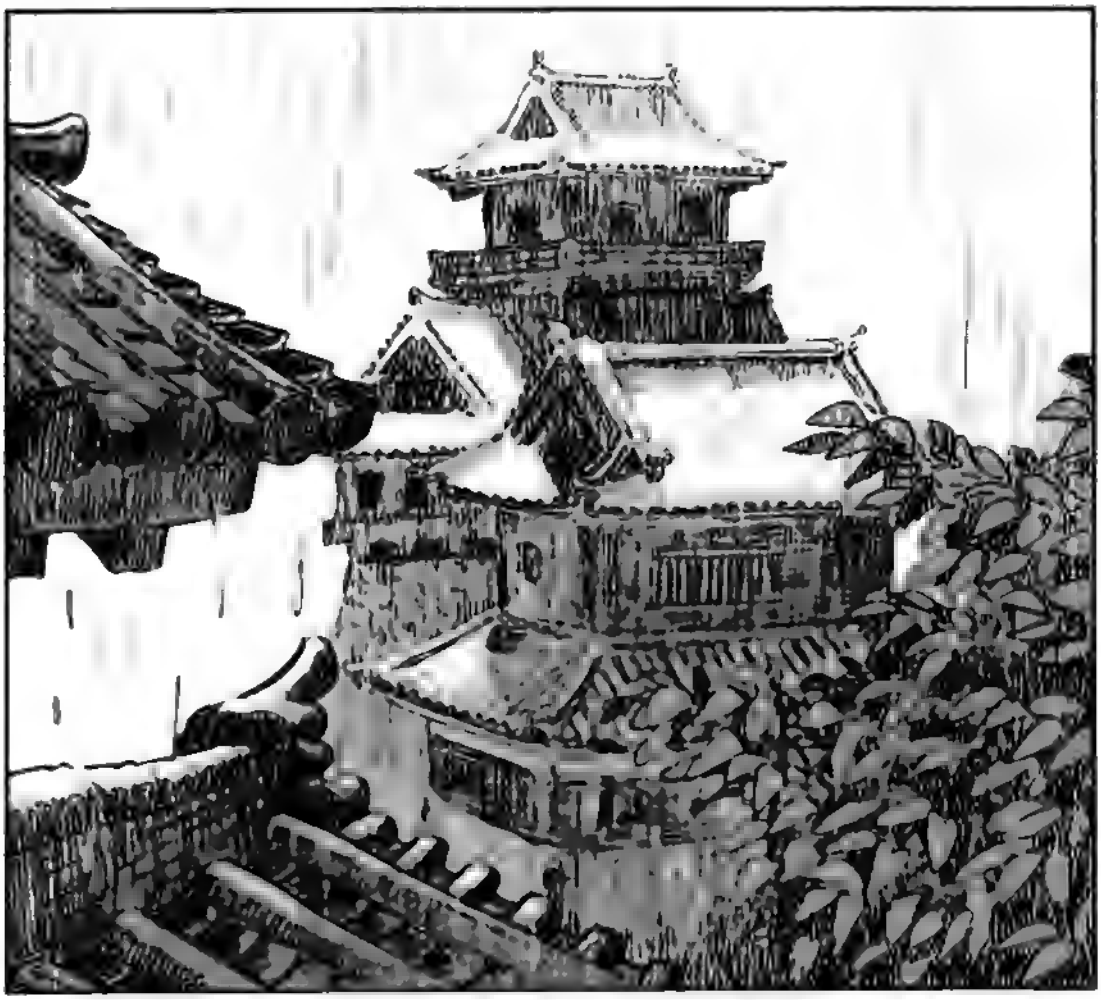
IF HE WAS A VASSAL, HE COULD NOT HAVE COME TO MIKAWA, ASKED TO BORROW MEN, AND SUGGESTED TO BUY FIREARMS.
ESPECIALLY NOT WHEN IT WAS FOR HIS OWN BENEFIT.
HIDEYOSHI WAS THE ONE WHO WAS WAVING THE *SAIHAI* AFTER ALL.

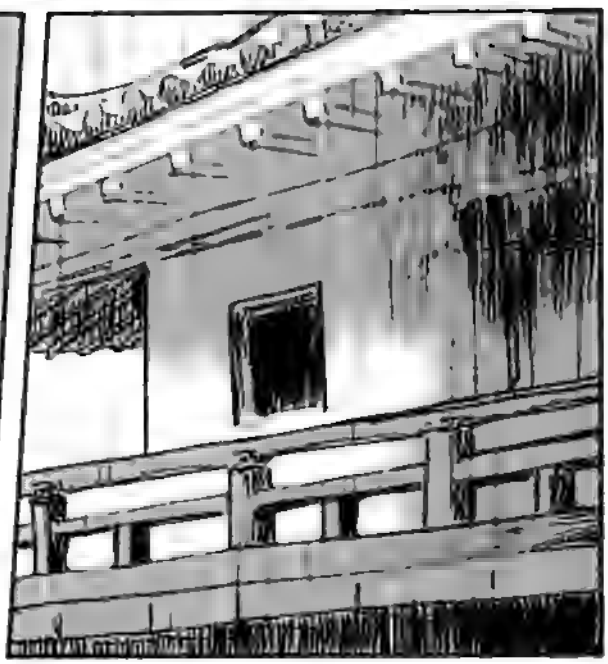
ALTHOUGH HE WAS WITH ODA, HE WAS NOT WITH ODA. HE WAS INDEED A GENERAL WHO SERVED HIS OWN LIFE, THOUGHT HANZŌ.
AND NOT WITHOUT NOBUNAGA'S KNOWLEDGE.

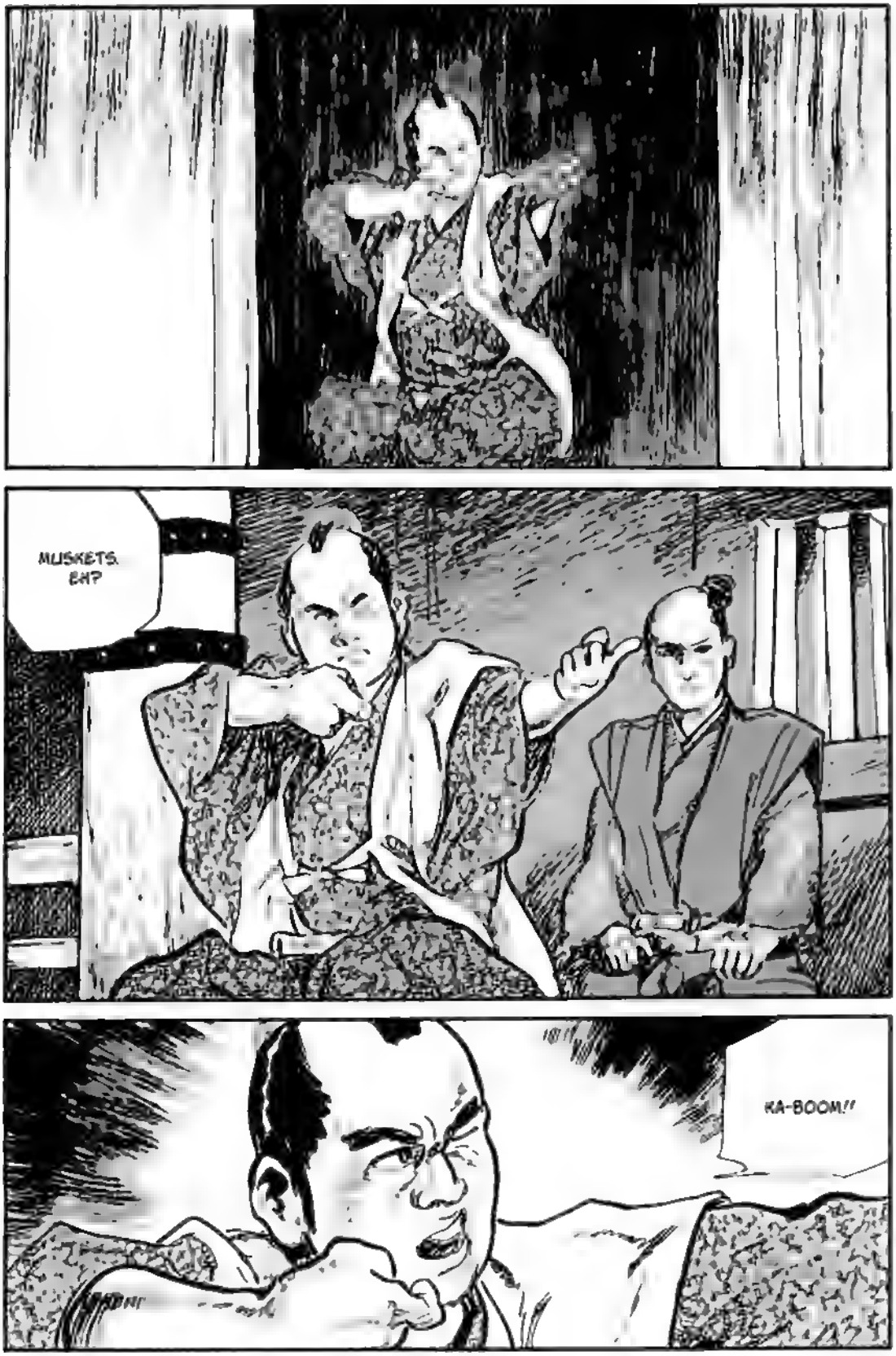
MAYBE....
MAYBE HIDEYOSHI WAS THE ONE WHO'D END UP RULING THE COUNTRY...
HANZŌ WONDERED AND DENIED HIS THOUGHT.
NO...

# Chapter On Jōsha Hissui

## No. 4: No Pretty Trees on the Mountain Top

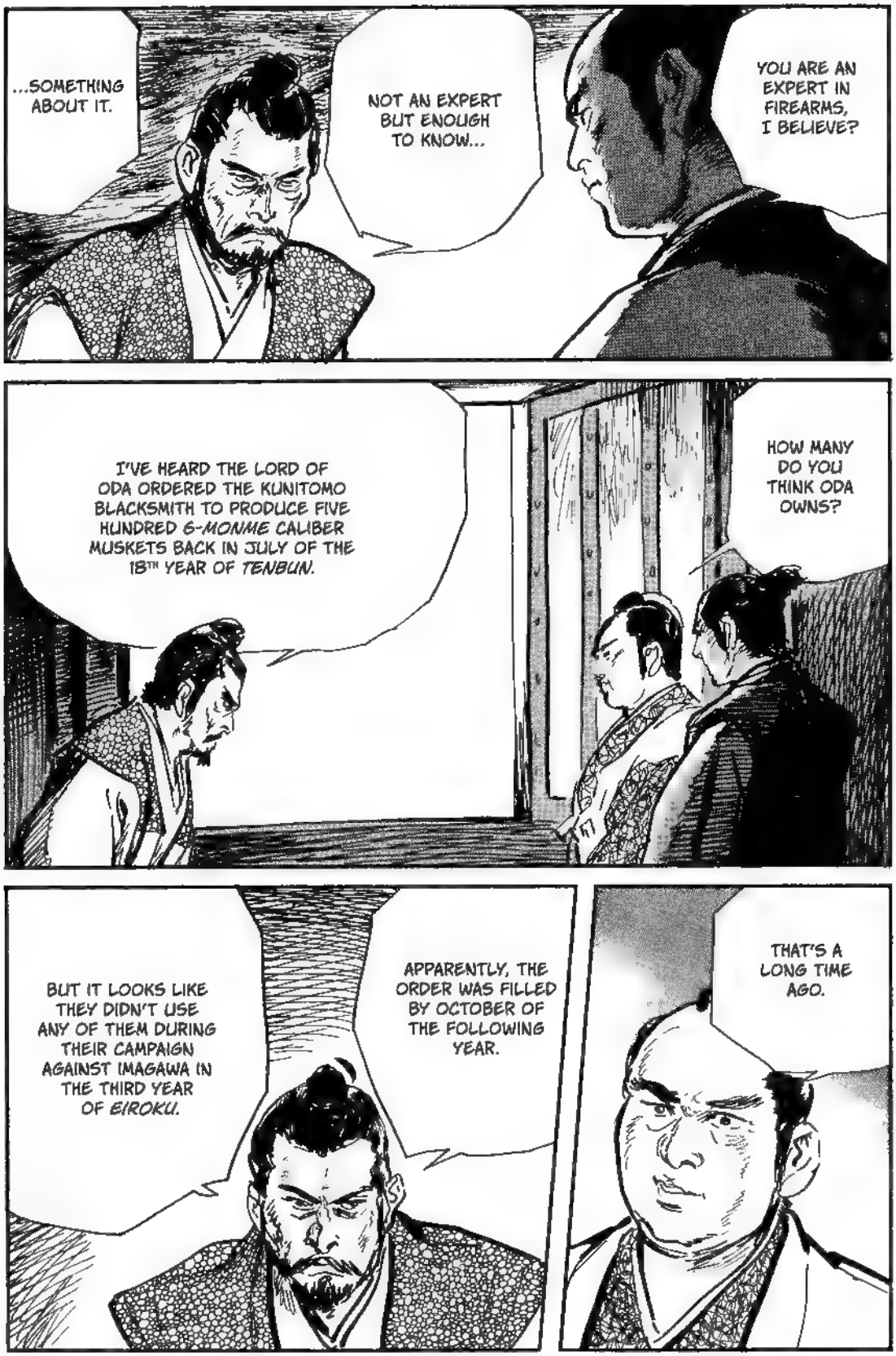





MUSKETS. EH?
KA-BOOM!!

ARMING IGAMONO WITH... GUNS, INDEED.
KA-BLAM!!
YES, SIR.
GET KÖRIKI.

KA-BOOM!
YES, SIR.
KIYONAGA.

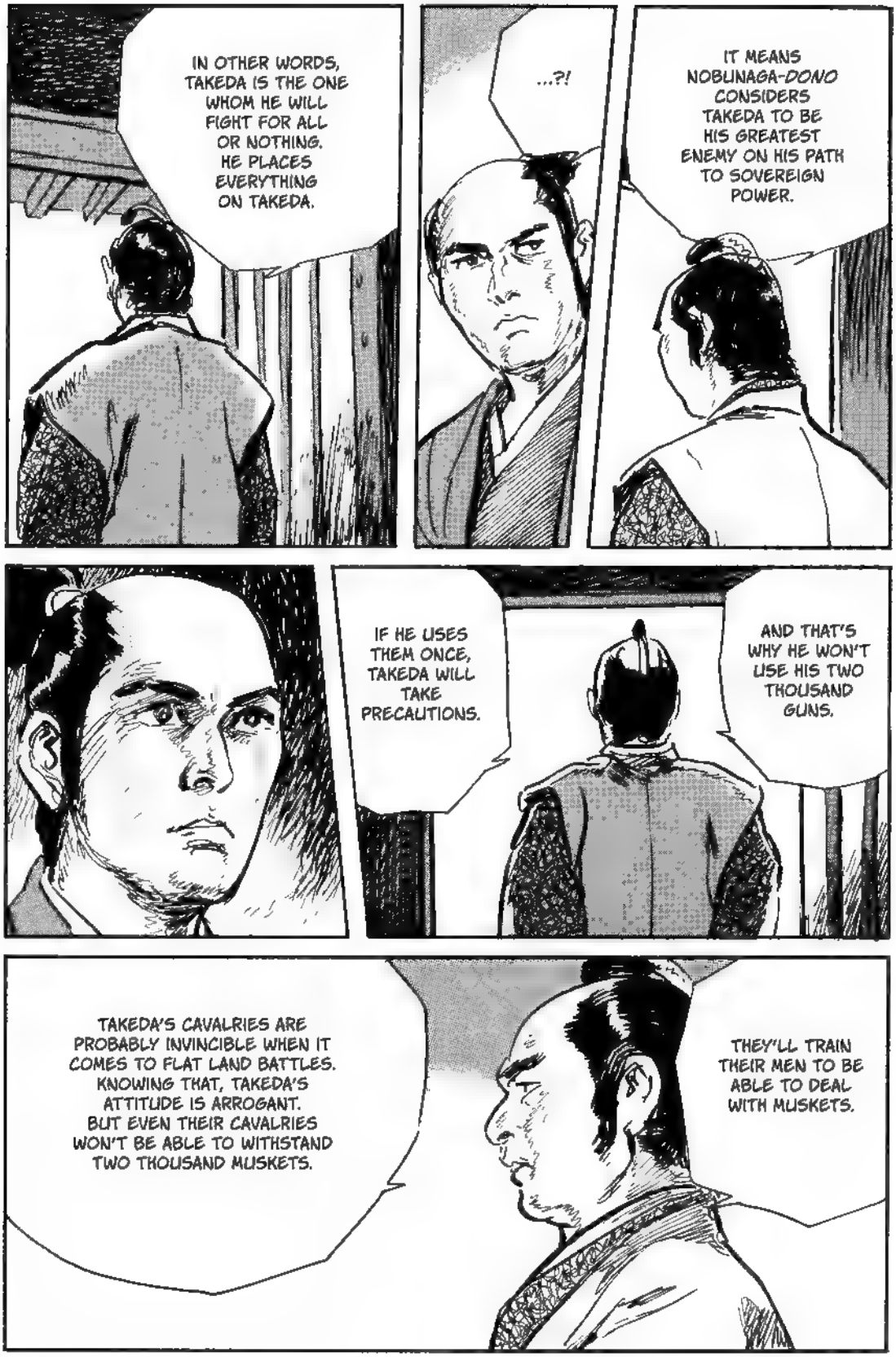

...SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
NOT AN EXPERT BUT ENOUGH TO KNOW...
YOU ARE AN EXPERT IN FIREARMS, I BELIEVE?
I'VE HEARD THE LORD OF ODA ORDERED THE KUNITOMO BLACKSMITH TO PRODUCE FIVE HUNDRED *6-MONME* CALIBER MUSKETS BACK IN JULY OF THE 18TH YEAR OF *TENBUN*.
HOW MANY DO YOU THINK ODA OWNS?
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THEY DIDN'T USE ANY OF THEM DURING THEIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST IMAGAWA IN THE THIRD YEAR OF *EIROKU*.
APPARENTLY, THE ORDER WAS FILLED BY OCTOBER OF THE FOLLOWING YEAR.
THAT'S A LONG TIME AGO.

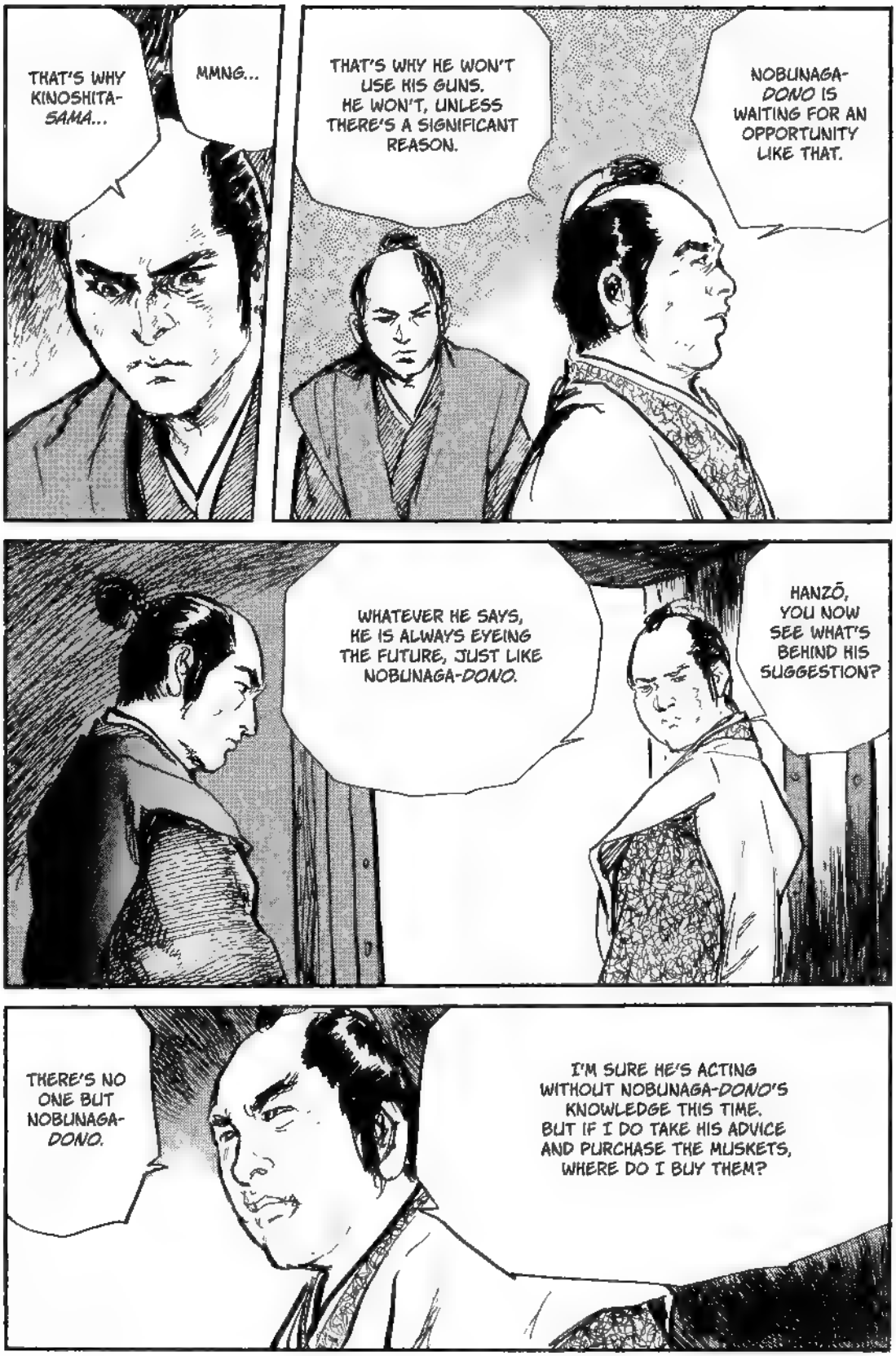
I BELIEVE THEY HAVE NO LESS THAN TWO THOUSAND BY NOW.
THEY PROBABLY DIDN'T NEED TO, GIVEN THEIR SURPRISE ATTACK IN THE POURING RAIN.
WHA... WHAT?
MMNG...
IF THEY KEPT ORDERING MORE, EVEN UNDER THE MOST CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE, THEY MUST HAVE ACCUMULATED AT LEAST TWO THOUSAND MUSKETS DURING THE PAST SIXTEEN YEARS.

BUT IF THEY OWN OVER TWO THOUSAND MUSKETS, IT MAKES THEM POWERFUL, THE DEGREE OF WHICH I CAN'T EVEN FATHOM.
THEIR OPPONENT IS HOLDING A CASTLE, AND THAT MAY EXPLAIN WHY.
ANOTHER POINT I'D LIKE TO MAKE IS THAT THEY ARE HARDLY USING FIREARMS IN THEIR ATTACK ON MINŌ.
I THINK IT'S TAKEDA.
KIYONAGA, WHY DO YOU THINK THEY DON'T?
WHY... WHY DON'T THEY USE THEM?

SO HOW MANY DO WE HAVE IN MIKAWA?!
MMNG... THAT'S IT!!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
NOT EVEN... THREE HUNDRED.
HMM.
WE WERE UNDER IMAGAWA'S THUMB, AND EVEN AFTER YOU RETURNED WE HAD PILES OF DIFFICULTIES TO DEAL WITH, WHICH MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO EVEN THINK ABOUT FIREARMS.
IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT AT ALL, MILORD.

WHEN KŌRIKI-*SAMA* MENTIONED TAKEDA, YOU SAID THAT WAS IT, MILORD. WILL YOU TELL ME WHAT THIS MEANS?

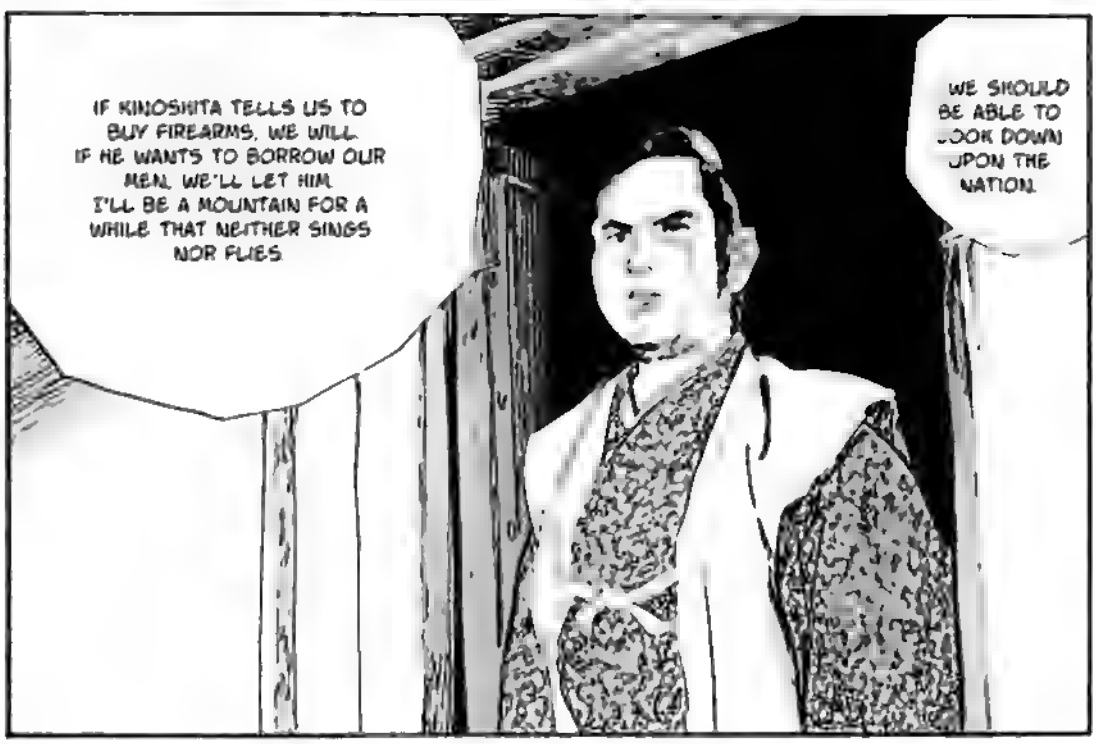

IN OTHER WORDS, TAKEDA IS THE ONE WHOM HE WILL FIGHT FOR ALL OR NOTHING. HE PLACES EVERYTHING ON TAKEDA.
...?!
IT MEANS NOBUNAGA-DONO CONSIDERS TAKEDA TO BE HIS GREATEST ENEMY ON HIS PATH TO SOVEREIGN POWER.
IF HE USES THEM ONCE, TAKEDA WILL TAKE PRECAUTIONS.
AND THAT'S WHY HE WON'T USE HIS TWO THOUSAND GUNS.
TAKEDA'S CAVALRIES ARE PROBABLY INVINCIBLE WHEN IT COMES TO FLAT LAND BATTLES. KNOWING THAT, TAKEDA'S ATTITUDE IS ARROGANT. BUT EVEN THEIR CAVALRIES WON'T BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND TWO THOUSAND MUSKETS.
THEY'LL TRAIN THEIR MEN TO BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH MUSKETS.

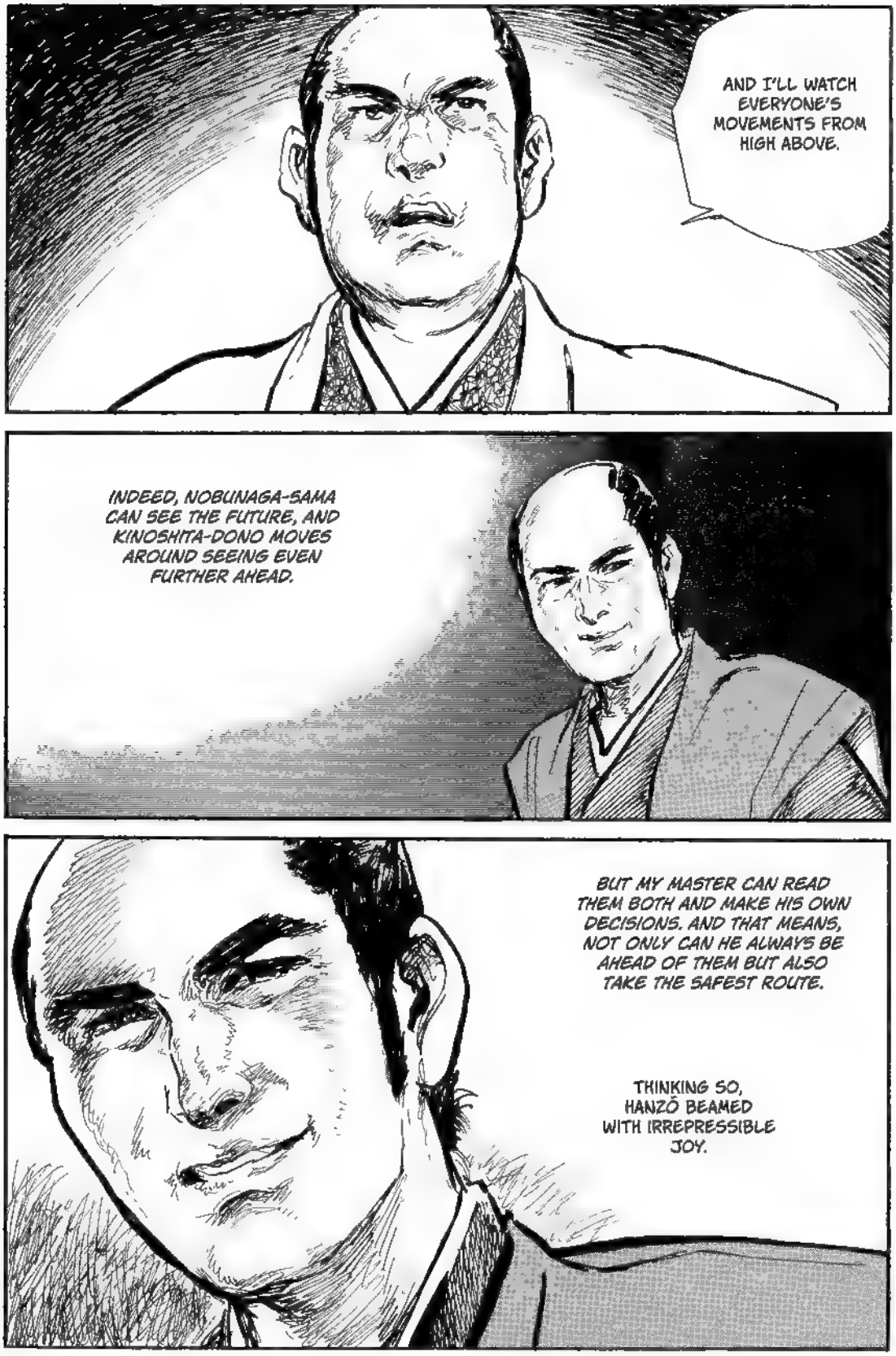

THAT'S WHY KINOSHITA-SAMA...
MMNG...
THAT'S WHY HE WON'T USE HIS GUNS. HE WON'T, UNLESS THERE'S A SIGNIFICANT REASON.
NOBUNAGA-DONO IS WAITING FOR AN OPPORTUNITY LIKE THAT.
WHATEVER HE SAYS, HE IS ALWAYS EYEING THE FUTURE, JUST LIKE NOBUNAGA-DONO.
HANZŌ, YOU NOW SEE WHAT'S BEHIND HIS SUGGESTION?
THERE'S NO ONE BUT NOBUNAGA-DONO.
I'M SURE HE'S ACTING WITHOUT NOBUNAGA-DONO'S KNOWLEDGE THIS TIME. BUT IF I DO TAKE HIS ADVICE AND PURCHASE THE MUSKETS, WHERE DO I BUY THEM?

IF I PURCHASE GUNS AND START USING THEM, NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL BE THRILLED TO SAY THE LEAST.
HE MEANS TO ARRANGE THAT TOO.
OH...
CRAP! WHY DIDN'T KINOSHITA-*SAMA* JUST TELL ME SO...?
BECAUSE HE CAN SCATTER SOME OF THE GUNS HE OWNS AND AVOID TAKEDA'S NOTICE. NOT ONLY THAT, IF KINOSHITA COULD EQUIP *IGAMONO* TO FIGHT MINŌ EFFECTIVELY, HE'D BE KILLING NOT JUST TWO BUT THREE OR FOUR BIRDS WITH ONE STONE. AND IT WILL ALL BE RECOGNIZED AS HIS FEAT.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. ANYWAY, LOOK HOW BEAUTIFUL THE MOUNTAINS ARE AFTER IT RAINS.
IT'S BEAUTIFUL. BUT THERE ARE HARDLY ANY PRETTY TREES ON TOP OF THE MOUNTAINS.
IT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE VIOLENT RAIN AND WIND, BURNING HEAT, AND HARSH FROST MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO GROW ON THE HIGHEST PEAKS.

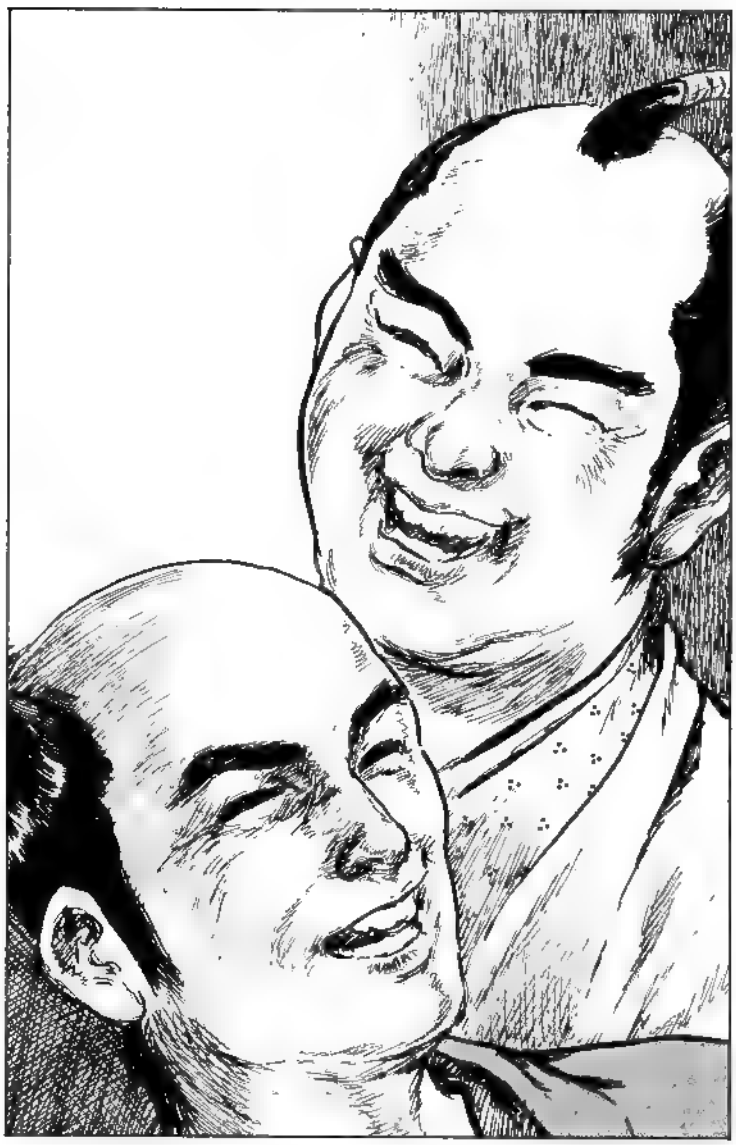
EVEN IF THERE ARE NO PRETTY TREES, A MOUNTAIN IS A MOUNTAIN SO LONG AS WE'RE A HIGH MOUNTAIN.
WHATEVER HAPPENS, WE'LL ENDURE, AND THAT'S FINE.
WHY NOT LIKEN MIKAWA TO SUCH A PEAK?

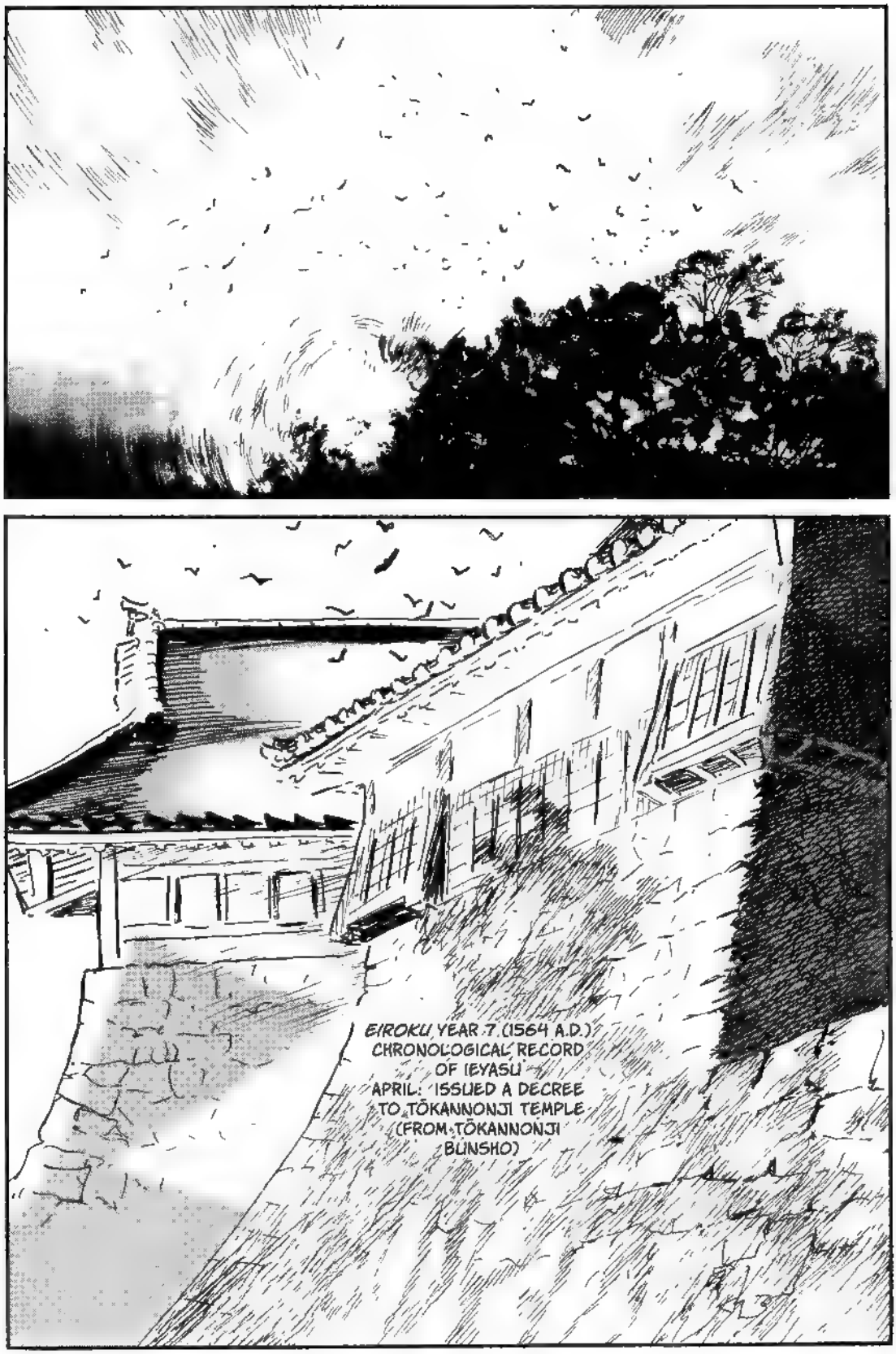

IF KINOSHITA TELLS US TO BUY FIREARMS, WE WILL. IF HE WANTS TO BORROW OUR MEN, WE'LL LET HIM. I'LL BE A MOUNTAIN FOR A WHILE THAT NEITHER SINGS NOR FLIES.
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO LOOK DOWN UPON THE NATION.


AND I'LL WATCH EVERYONE'S MOVEMENTS FROM HIGH ABOVE.
INDEED, NOBUNAGA-SAMA CAN SEE THE FUTURE, AND KINOSHITA-DONO MOVES AROUND SEEING EVEN FURTHER AHEAD.
BUT MY MASTER CAN READ THEM BOTH AND MAKE HIS OWN DECISIONS. AND THAT MEANS, NOT ONLY CAN HE ALWAYS BE AHEAD OF THEM BUT ALSO TAKE THE SAFEST ROUTE.
THINKING SO, HANZŌ BEAMED WITH IRREPRESSIBLE JOY.

# Chapter On Jōsha Hissui

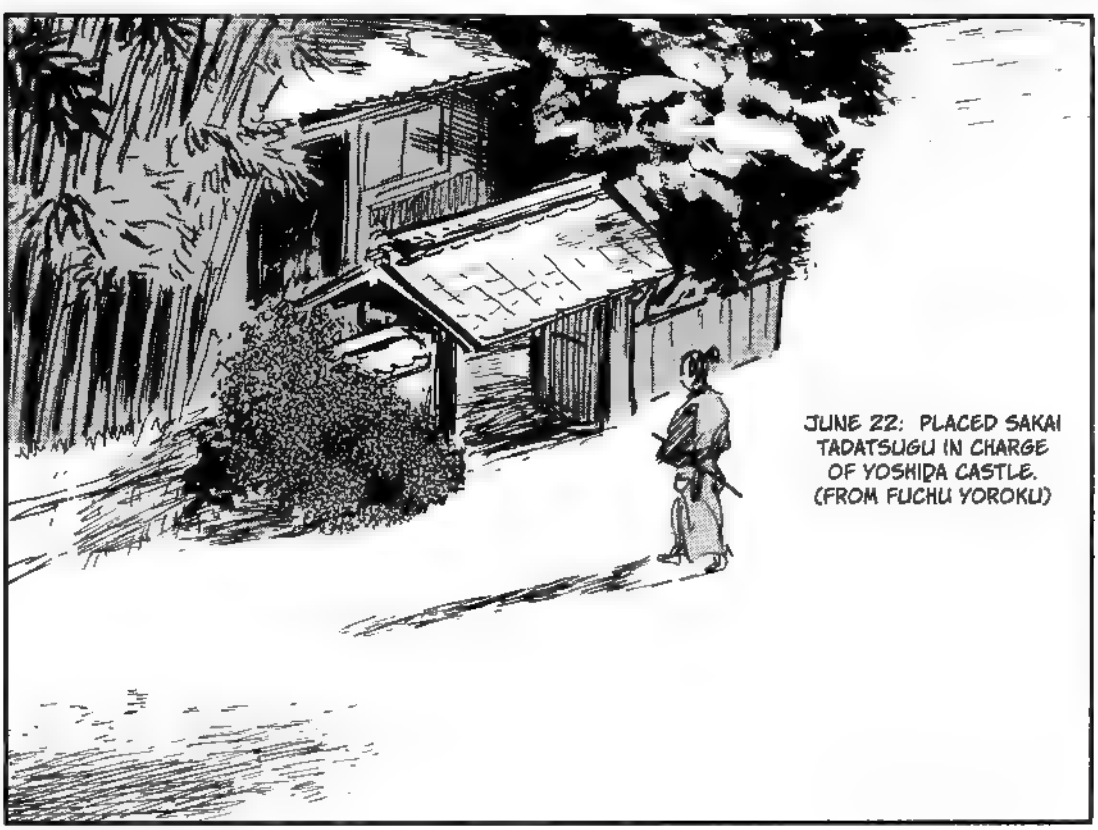
## No. 5: Neither Sings nor Flies




EIROKU, YEAR 7 (1564 A.D.)
CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD
OF IEYASU
APRIL: ISSUED A DECREE
TO TŌKANNONJI TEMPLE
(FROM TŌKANNONJI
BUNSHO)

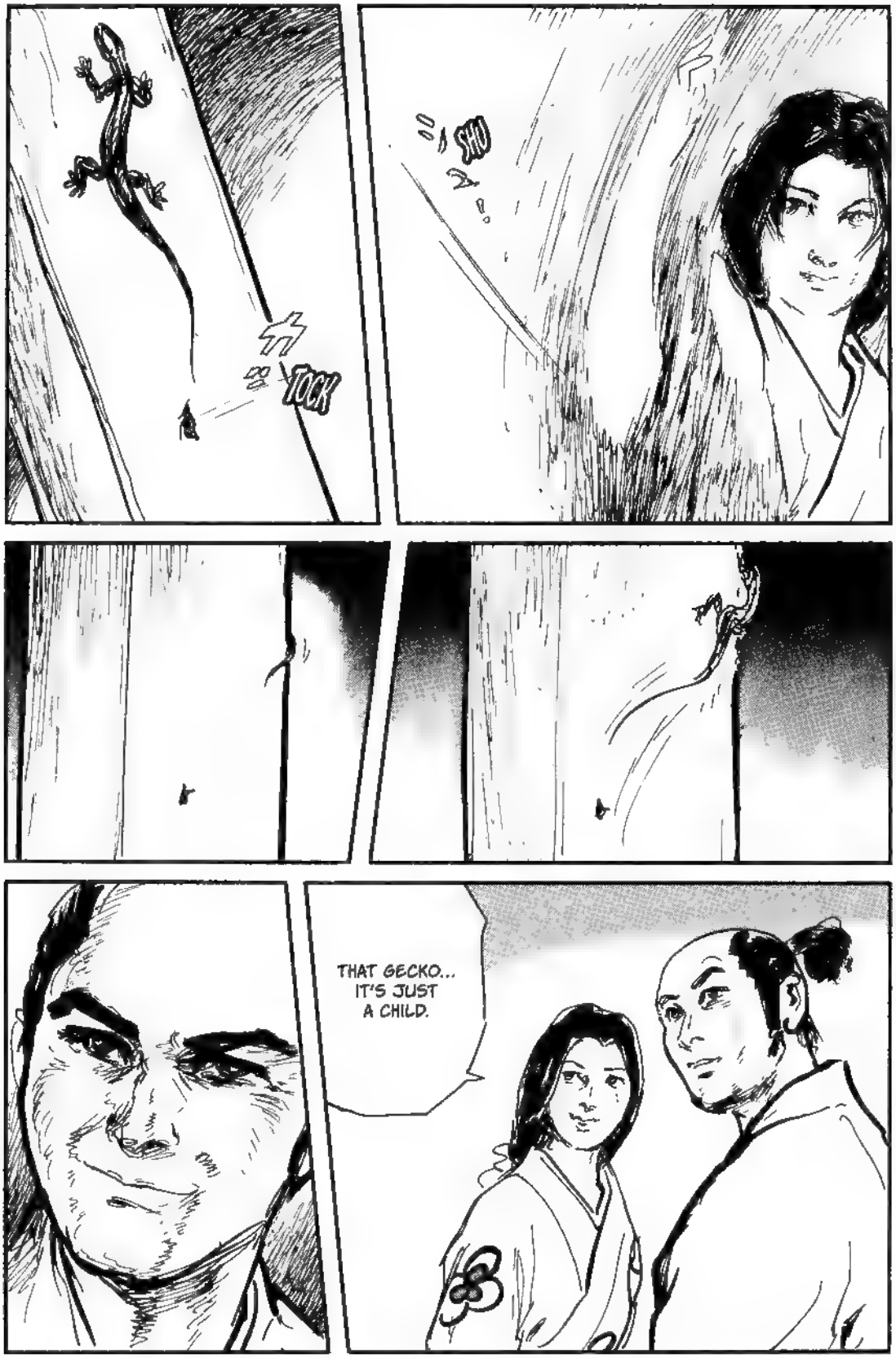
MAY 13: NIRENGI CASTLE REASSURED TODA SHIGESADA OF HIS FIEFDOM. (FROM SHAHON SHIGA BUNSHO)
MAY 27: ESTABLISHED TEMPLE RULES AT DAIGANJI TEMPLE. (FROM SANSHŪ JISHA KOBUNSHO)
MAY 28: ISSUED DECREES TO VARIOUS SHRINES AND TEMPLES IN MIKAWA.

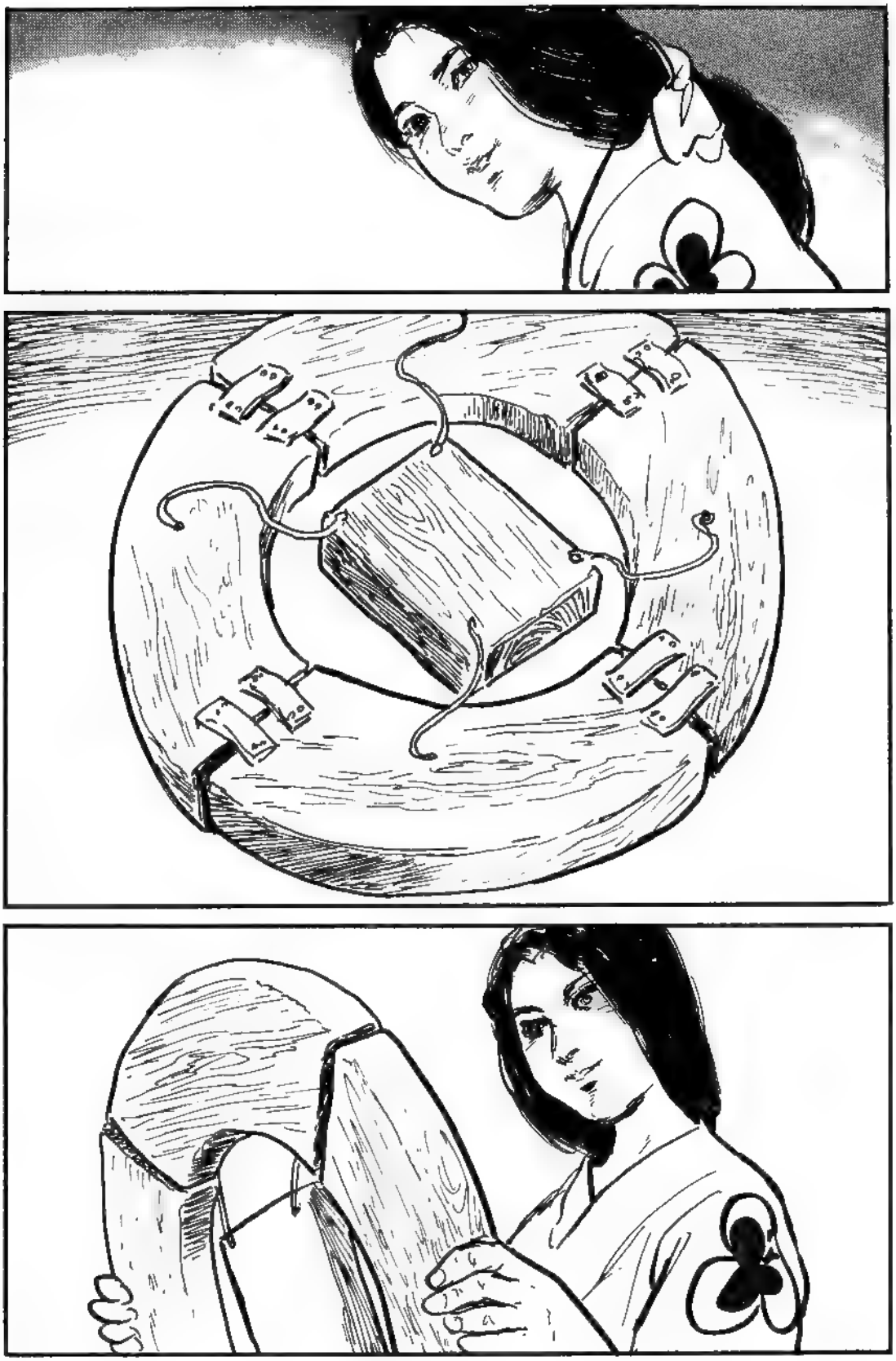
JUNE 11: REASSURED EGYŌ
OF HIS PRIESTHOOD AT TAHARA
JŌHŌJI TEMPLE.
(FROM SANSHŪ JISHA
KOBUNSHO)

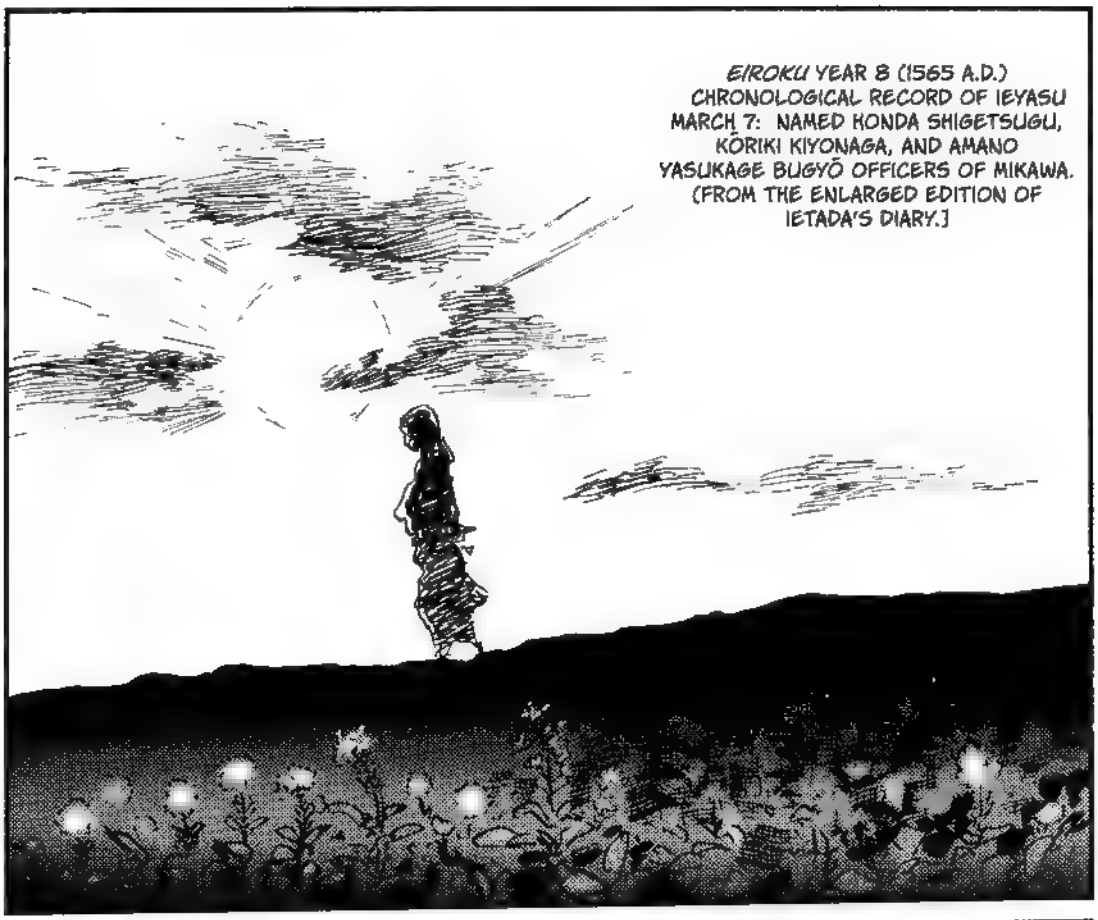

JUNE 22: PLACED SAKAI
TADATSUGU IN CHARGE
OF YOSHIDA CASTLE.
(FROM FUCHU YOROKU)

AUGUST 12:
REASSURED
NODANOHŌ UNSHŌJI
TEMPLE OF THEIR
TRADITIONAL
HOLDINGS.
(FROM SANSHŪ JISHA
KOBUNSHO)
DECEMBER: REASSURED
ŌNISHI KAIMAJI TEMPLE OF THEIR
TRADITIONAL HOLDINGS.
(FROM KŌRYŪJI BUNSHO)

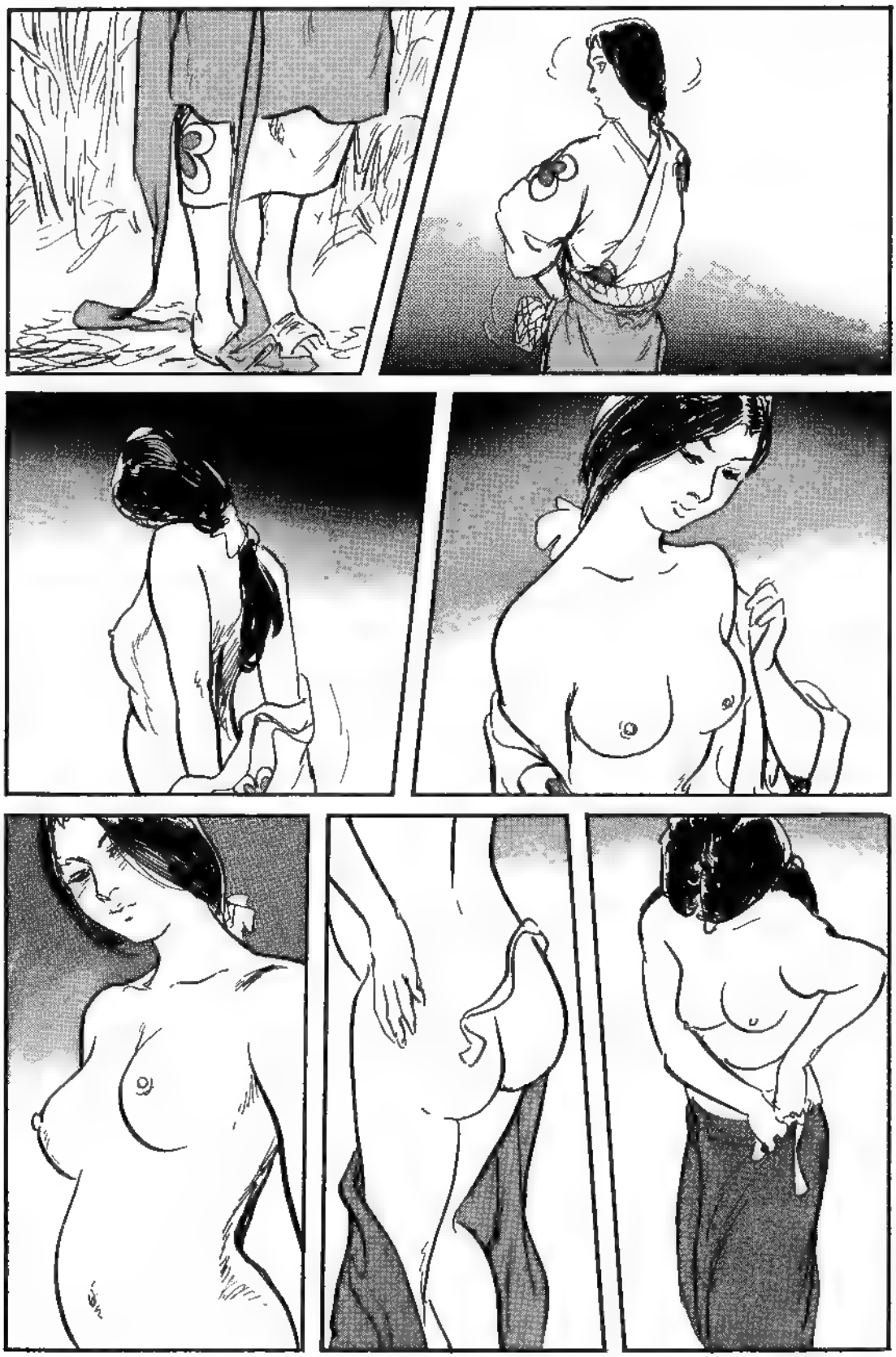
TRY SHOOTING IT.


TOCK
SHU
THAT GECKO... IT'S JUST A CHILD.



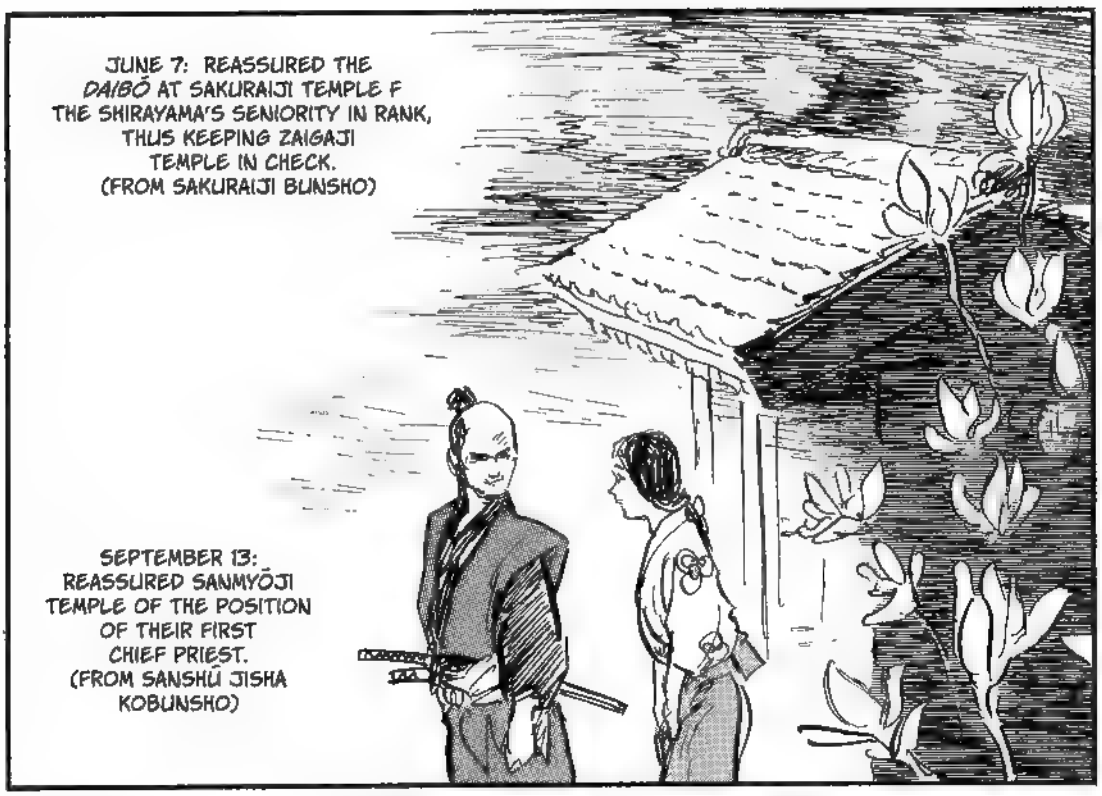

*EIROKU* YEAR 8 (1565 A.D.)
CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD OF IEYASU
MARCH 7: NAMED HONDA SHIGETSUGU,
KŌRIKI KIYONAGA, AND AMANO
YASUKAGE BUGYŌ OFFICERS OF MIKAWA.
(FROM THE ENLARGED EDITION OF
IETADA'S DIARY.]

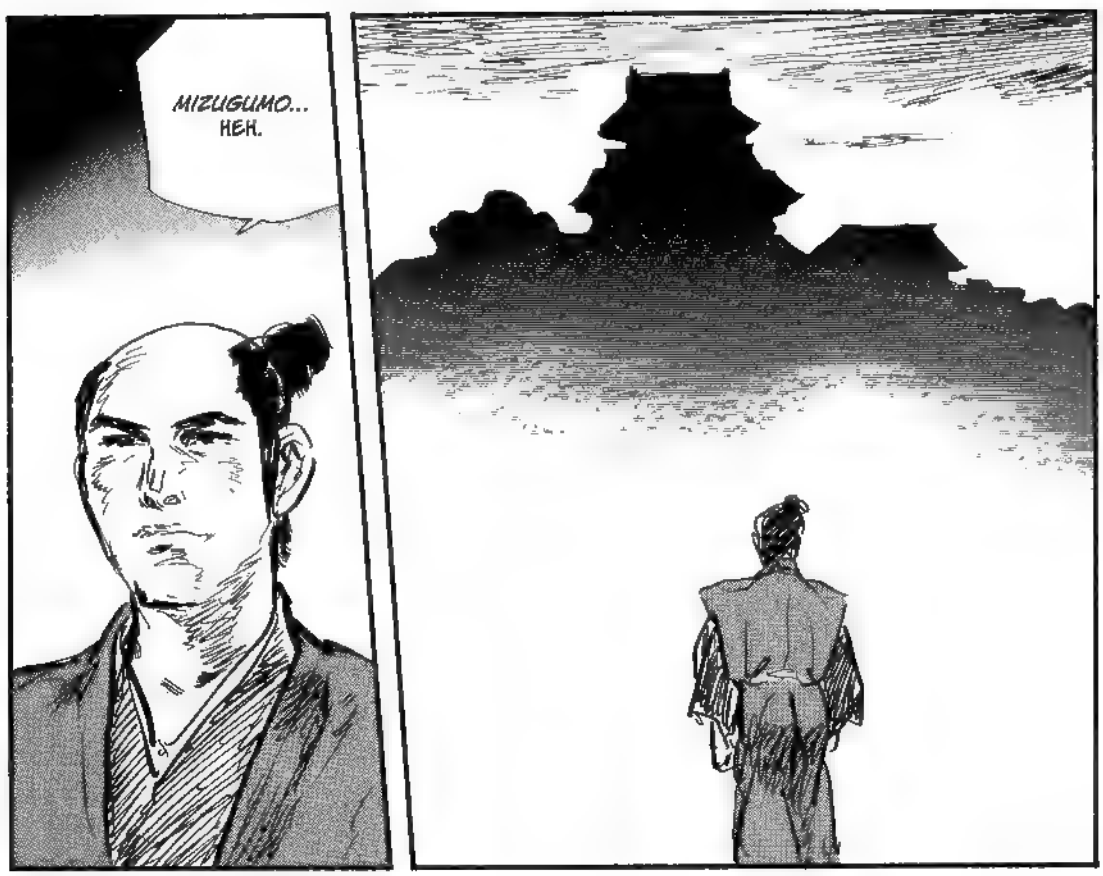
APRIL 28: REASSURED TŌKANNONJI
TEMPLE OF THEIR TRADITIONAL HOLDINGS
AND THEIR SUBORDINATE TEMPLES.
(FROM TŌKANNONJI BUNSHO)
MAY 19: REASSURED
CHŌSENJI TEMPLE OF THEIR
TRADITIONAL HOLDINGS.
(FROM CHŌSENJI BUNSHO)

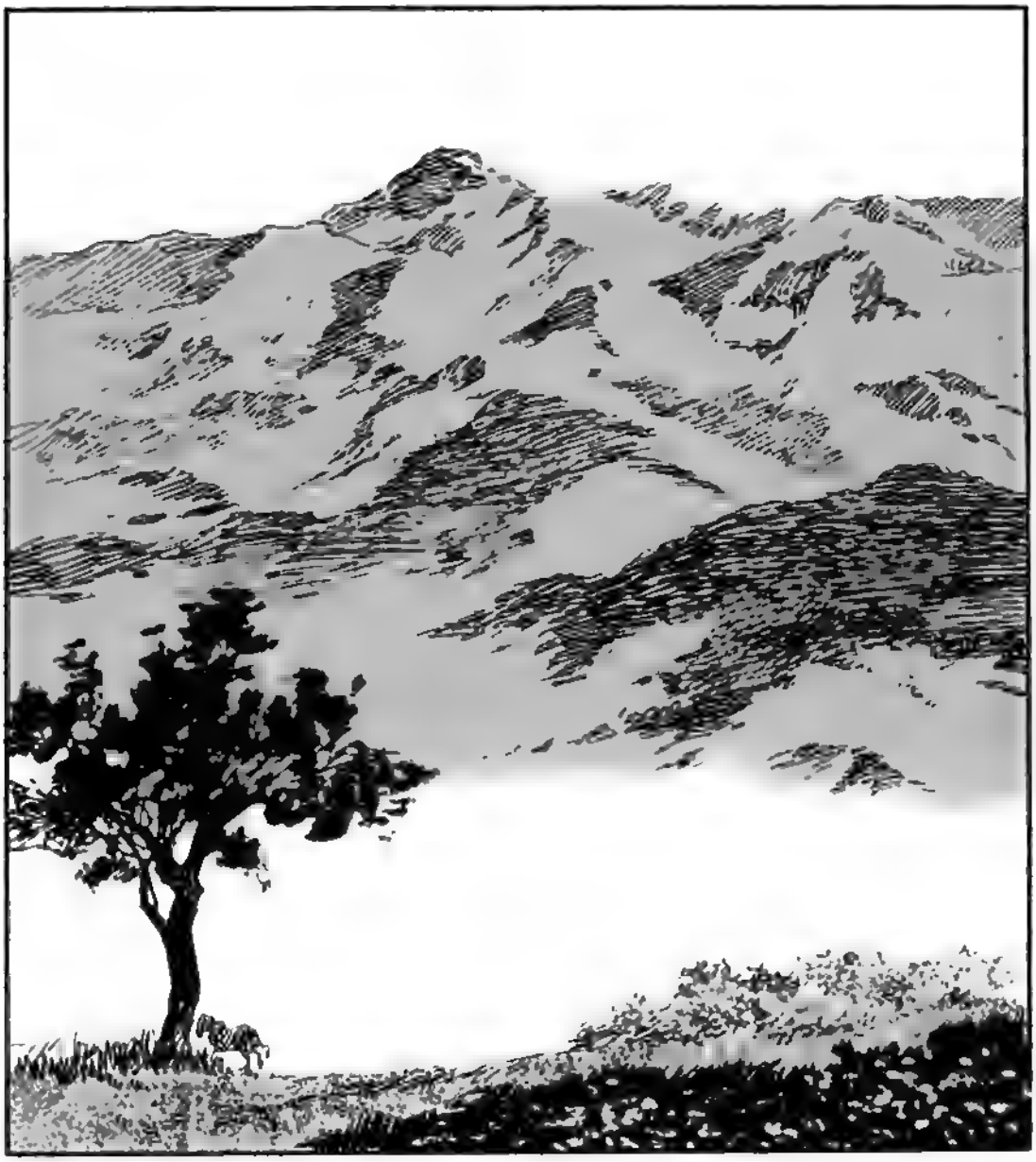


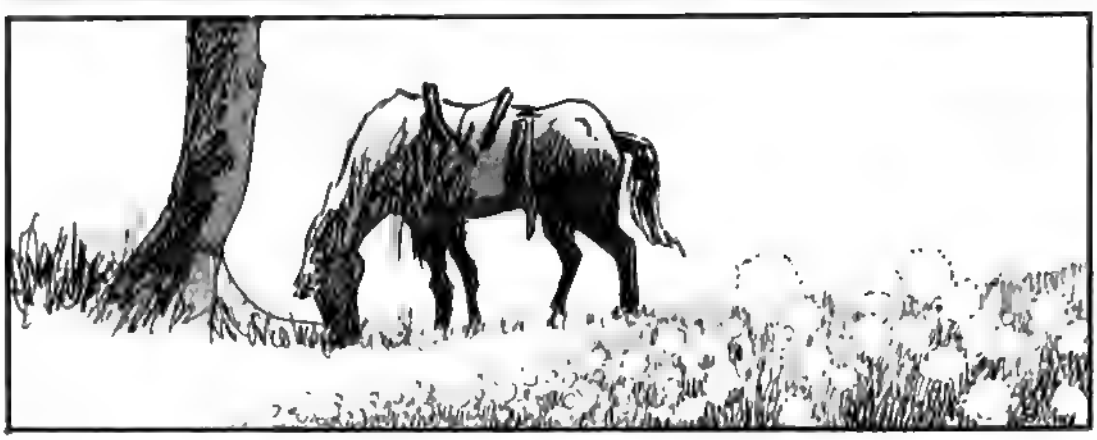
...FROM ME AND OUR BABY, WISHING FOR YOUR SAFETY.
IT'S A GIFT...

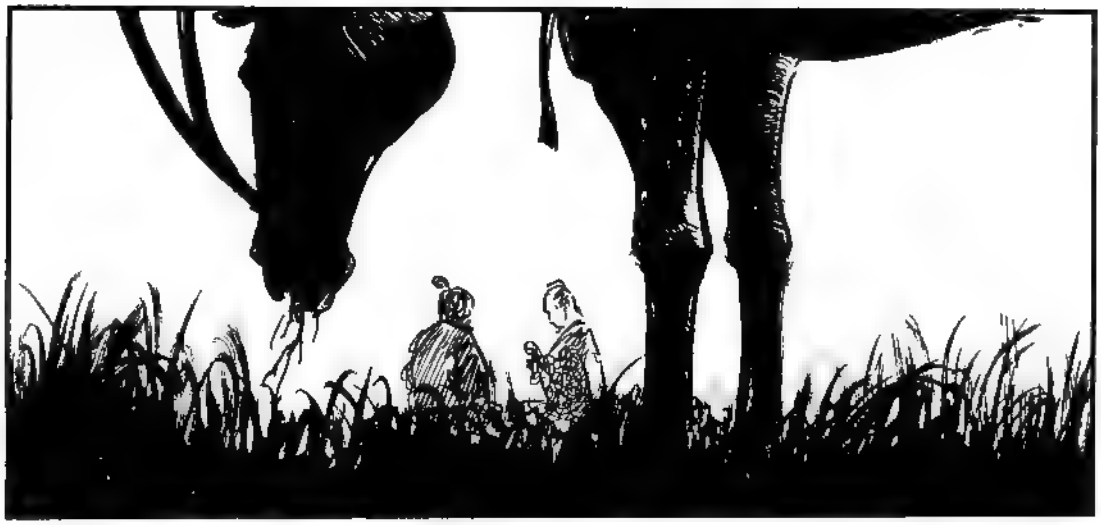
REMEMBER, TODAY IS THE DAY YOU WERE BORN.
BUT WHY?
HMM.
MIZUGUMO...
I WANT YOU TO STAY AFLOAT AND NEVER SINK.
I WANT YOU TO NEVER LOSE OR SINK BENEATH THE VIOLENT WAVES OF THIS WAR-RIDDEN WORLD.
OH.
I'LL BE FINE SO LONG AS YOU ARE WITH ME.

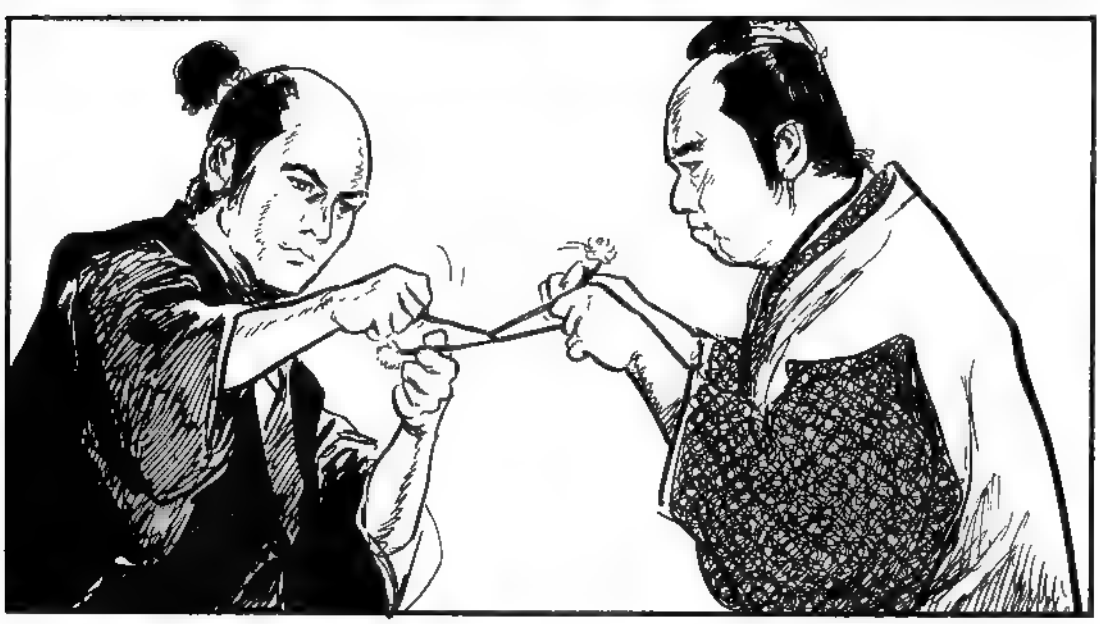

JUNE 7: REASSURED THE DAIBŌ AT SAKURAIJI TEMPLE F THE SHIRAYAMA'S SENIORITY IN RANK, THUS KEEPING ZAIGAJI TEMPLE IN CHECK. (FROM SAKURAIJI BUNSHO)
SEPTEMBER 13: REASSURED SANMYŌJI TEMPLE OF THE POSITION OF THEIR FIRST CHIEF PRIEST. (FROM SANSHŪ JISHA KOBUNSHO)

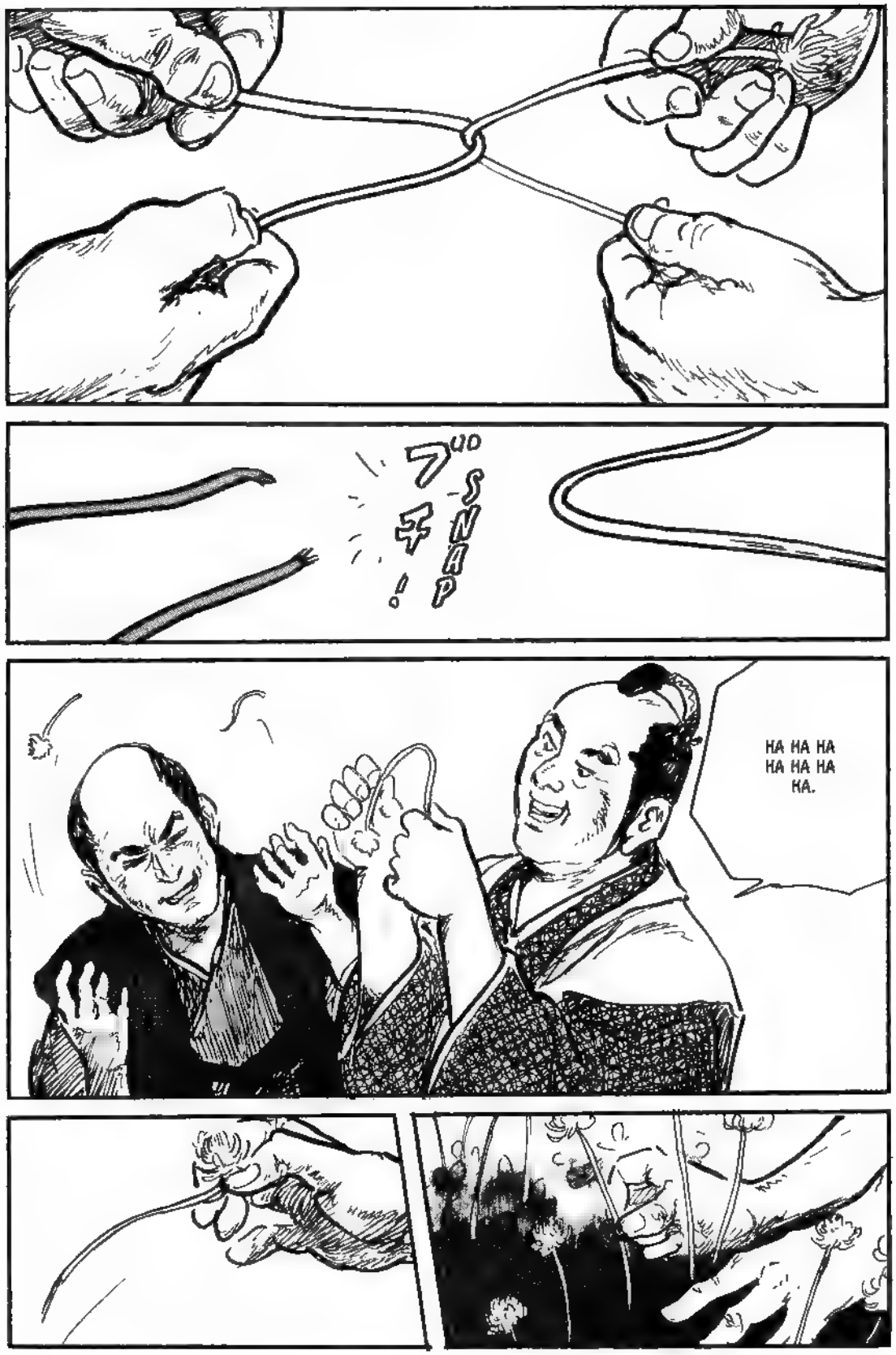

MIZUGUMO... HEH.



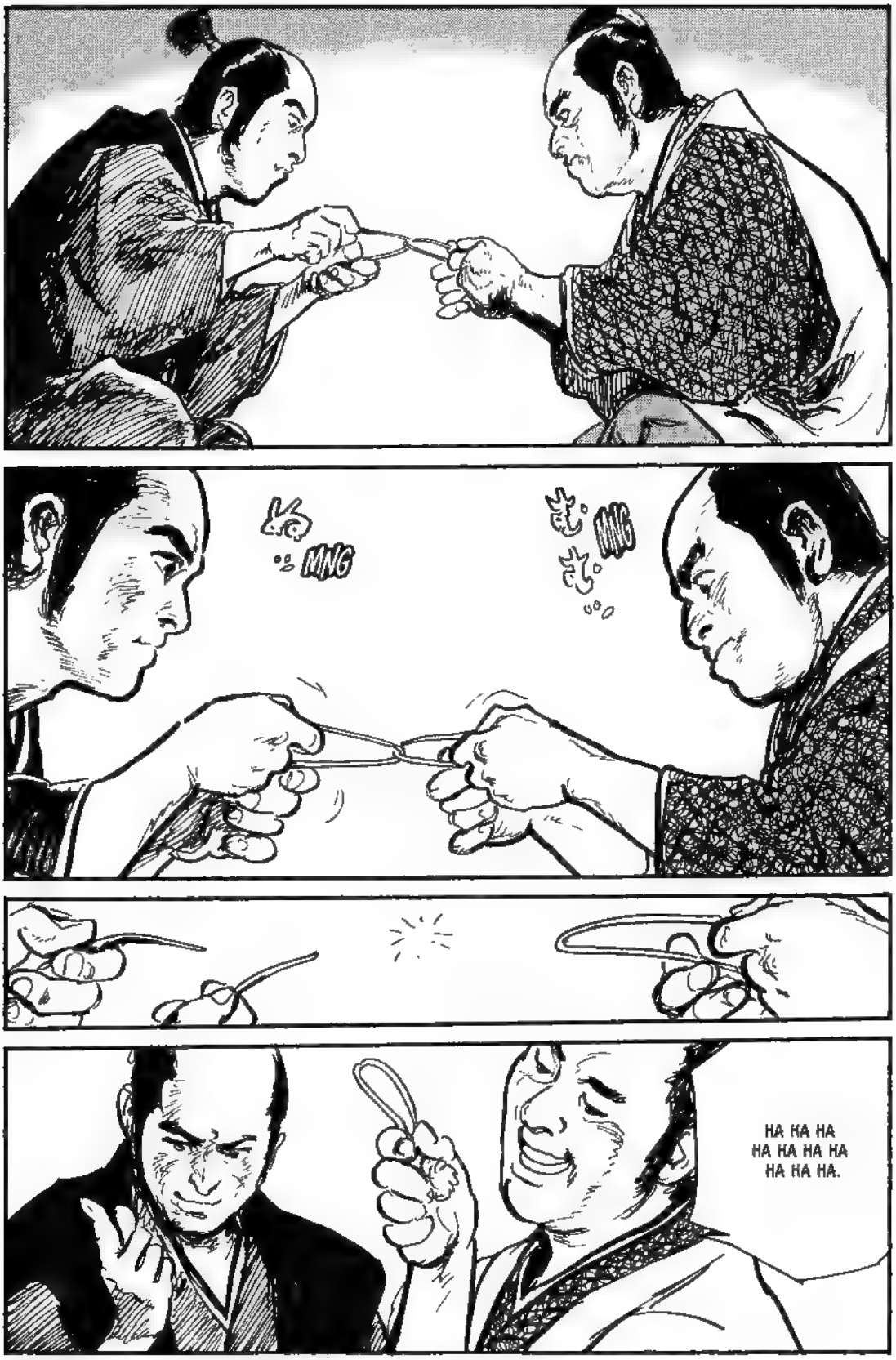




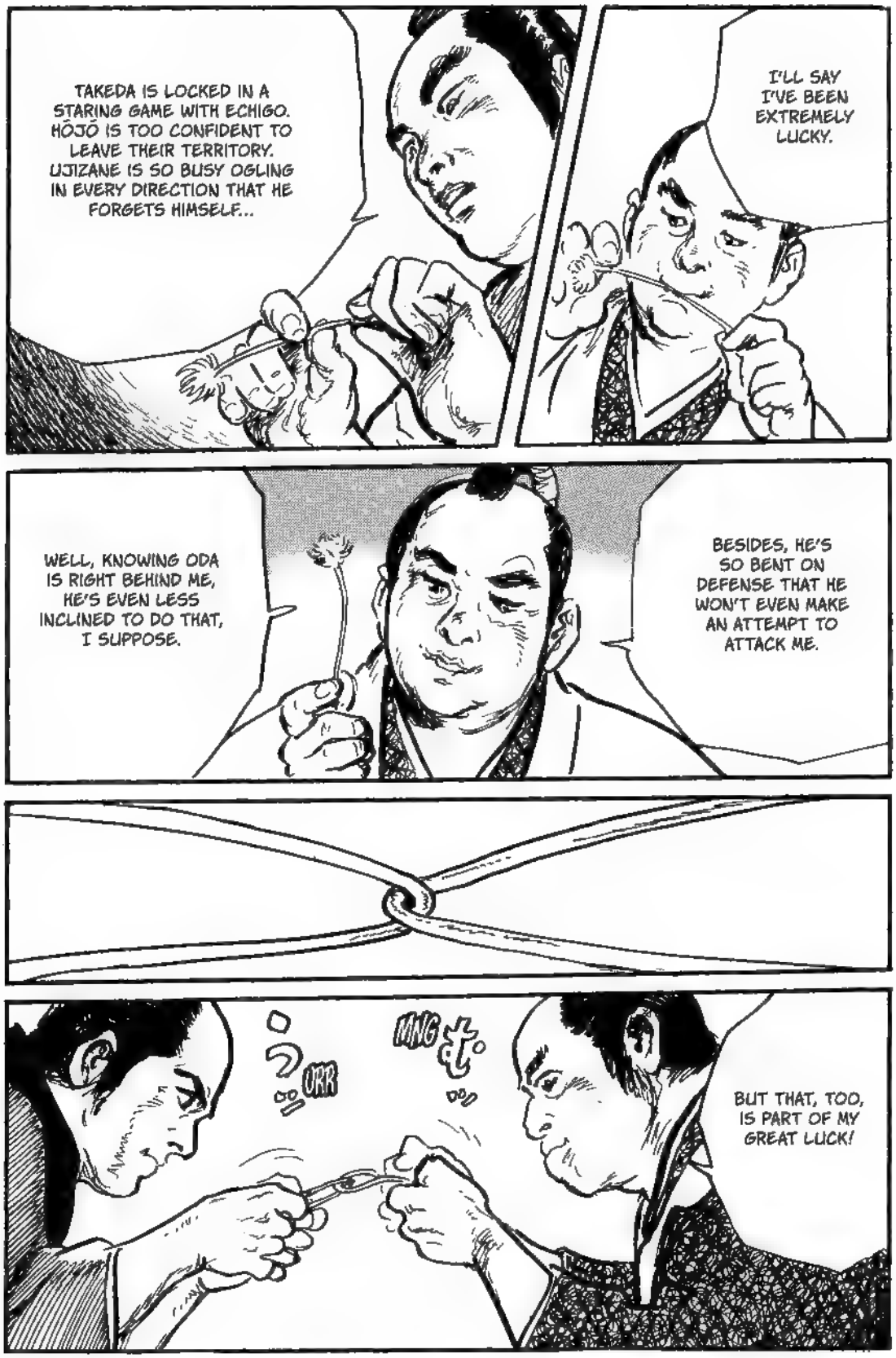



SNAP
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA.

ONCE I SOFTEN THE STEM, IT'LL BECOME STRONGER AND HARDER TO BREAK.
I WON'T LOSE THIS TIME!
YES.
EAST MIKAWA IS UNDER CONTROL, AND MOST OF THE TEMPLES AND SHRINES HAVE RECEIVED MY LETTER OF REASSURANCE. SO DOMESTICALLY, THINGS ARE PRETTY MUCH SETTLED IN MIKAWA.


MNG
MNG
HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA.

THE MORE MY STEM FIGHTS, THE MORE DOGGED IT BECOMES.
TRY AS MUCH AS YOU WANT, BUT IT WILL BE THE SAME.
HOLD YOUR BREATH, SIR!
JUST LIKE A VETERAN WITH MANY BATTLES BEHIND HIM.
I'LL GO THE OTHER WAY AND FIGHT YOU WITH THIS THIN STEM THAT LOOKS SO PERSISTENT.
I THOUGHT THE THICKER ONES WOULD BE STRONGER, BUT...


TAKEDA IS LOCKED IN A STARING GAME WITH ECHIGO. HŌJŌ IS TOO CONFIDENT TO LEAVE THEIR TERRITORY. UJIZANE IS SO BUSY OGLING IN EVERY DIRECTION THAT HE FORGETS HIMSELF...
I'LL SAY I'VE BEEN EXTREMELY LUCKY.
WELL, KNOWING ODA IS RIGHT BEHIND ME, HE'S EVEN LESS INCLINED TO DO THAT, I SUPPOSE.
BESIDES, HE'S SO BENT ON DEFENSE THAT HE WON'T EVEN MAKE AN ATTEMPT TO ATTACK ME.
ORR
BUT THAT, TOO, IS PART OF MY GREAT LUCK!

I'M LUCKY INDEED! HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA. AH HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA.
THAT'S NOT FAIR.
YOU LICKED THE STEM AND MADE IT STRONGER, DIDN'T YOU?
ALL RIGHT. I'LL CHALLENGE YOU WITH THIS NEW ONE.

WELL THEN, I WILL USE THE STEM YOU THREW AWAY.
THAT'S HOW IT GOES IN THIS TIME OF WARRING STATES.
MMG! YOU TRICKED ME!
READY!
READY?
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

AH HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA HA
UWA HA HA HA HA
IF THIS ISN'T GREAT LUCK, WHAT IS?
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
I SHOULDN'T DEFEAT MY MASTER, BECAUSE OTHERWISE IT WILL BE GEKOKUJŌ!
HA HA HA HA HA HA

WHILE WE'RE LEFT ALONE...
THERE'S NO ONE WHO'D INVADE MIKAWA.
NEITHER SINGS NOR FLIES-- THE PHRASE IS OFTEN USED
BUT I THINK ONE CANNOT BE MORE FORTUNATE THAN TO DO WITHOUT SINGING OR FLYING, BECAUSE ANYTHING THAT FLIES WILL FALL, AND ANYTHING THAT SINGS WILL BE CRITICIZED AS NOISY.
HOW LUCKY I AM.
...I CAN FOCUS ONLY ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS.

THAT'S WHY I MAY NOT FLY WITH MY WINGS SPREAD...
BUT IF YOU DO, YOU'D BE LOOKED DOWN UPON, DON'T YOU THINK?
IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, I WOULD GO ON WITHOUT SINGING OR FLYING THE REST OF MY LIFE.
BUT I WILL HOP LIKE A FROG.

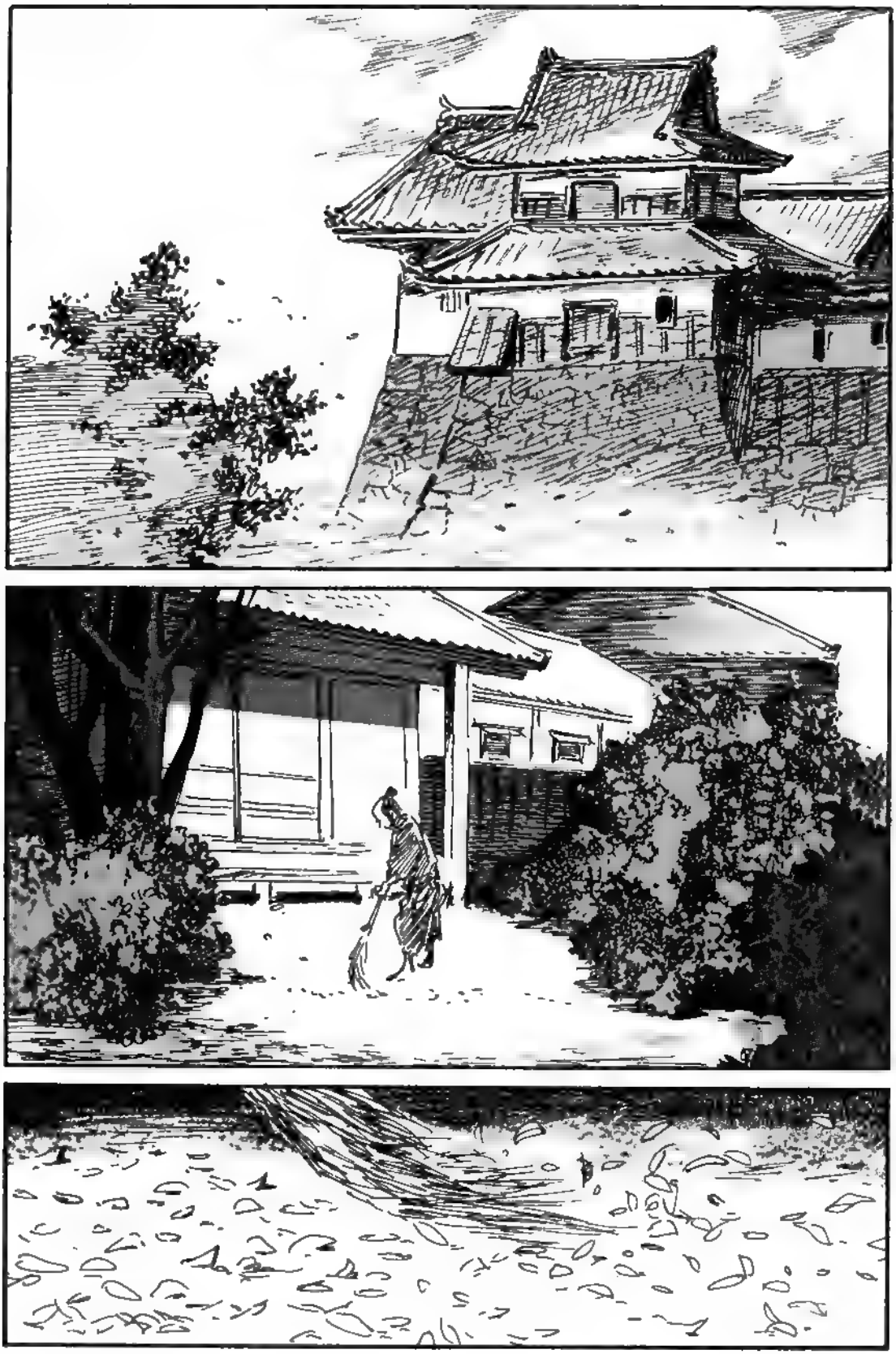
NOT ENOUGH TO DRAW ANY ATTENTION.
ONLY JUST A LITTLE.
I'M THINKING OF SUBMITTING A PETITION TO THE IMPERIAL COURT-- TO CHANGE MY NAME FROM MATSUDAIRA TO TOKUGAWA.

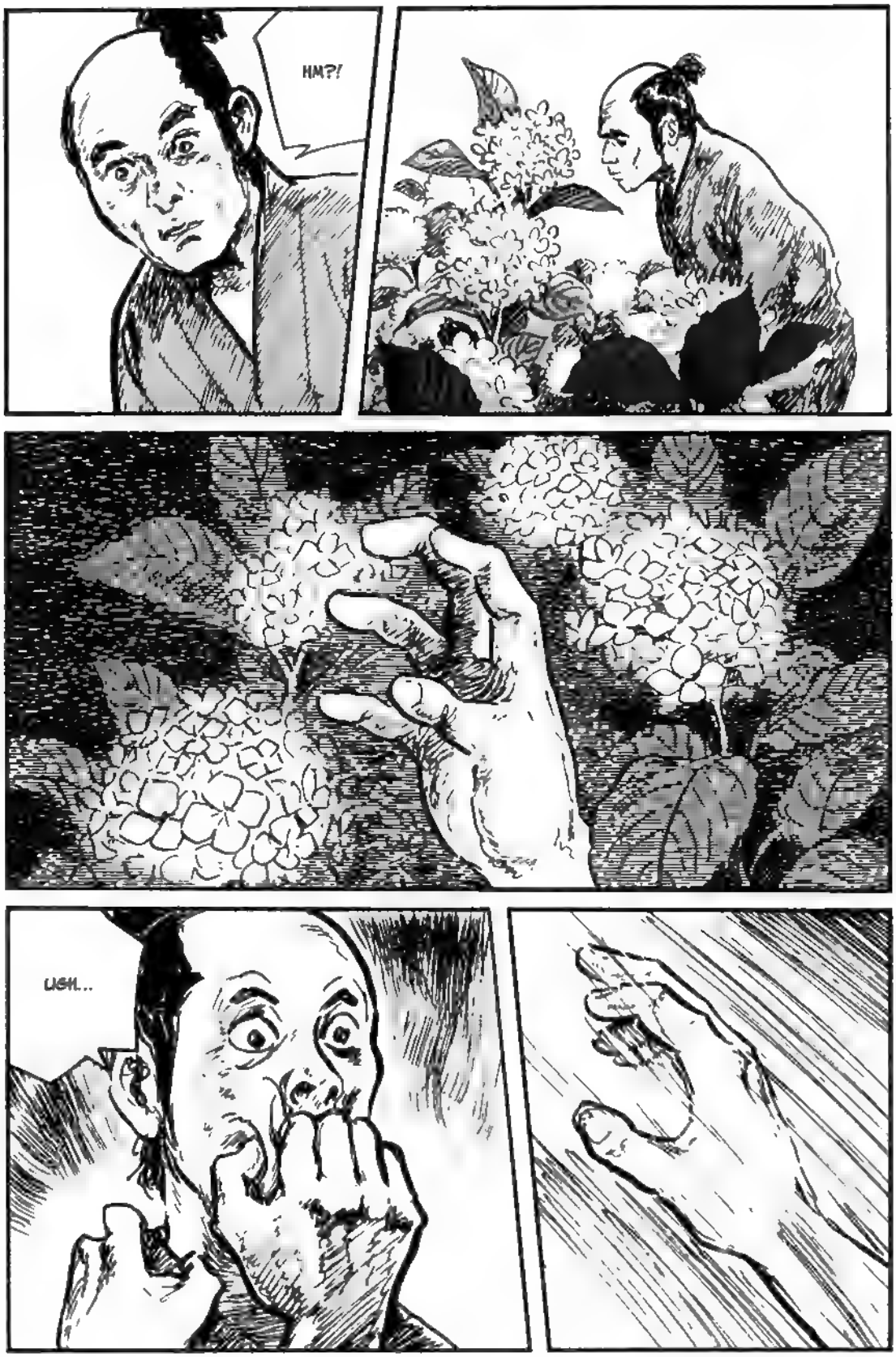
AS I MENTIONED SOME TIME AGO...
...I WANT TO BECOME A RIVER THAT FLOWS THICK WITH VIRTUE. I WANT TO BECOME A RIVER SO GREAT IT ATTRACTS MORE STREAMS.
IT WILL BE TOO SMALL IF IT'S CONFINED TO MIKAWA SO I WANT TO BECOME A RIVER OF VIRTUE THAT FLOWS INTO THE SEA--THE FINAL DESTINATION.
...IT'S TIME. .
NOW THAT PEACE IS RESTORED THROUGHOUT MIKAWA...

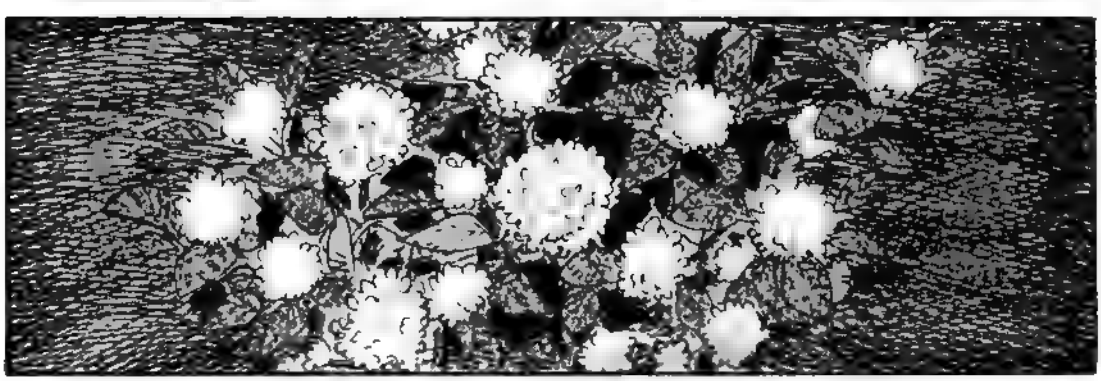
*EIROKU* YEAR 9 (1566 A.D.)
THE IMPERIAL COURT GRANTED IEYASU PERMISSION TO CHANGE HIS NAME TO TOKUGAWA, AND BESTOWED UPON HIM THE TITLE OF *JUGOIGE MIKAWA-NO-KAMI*

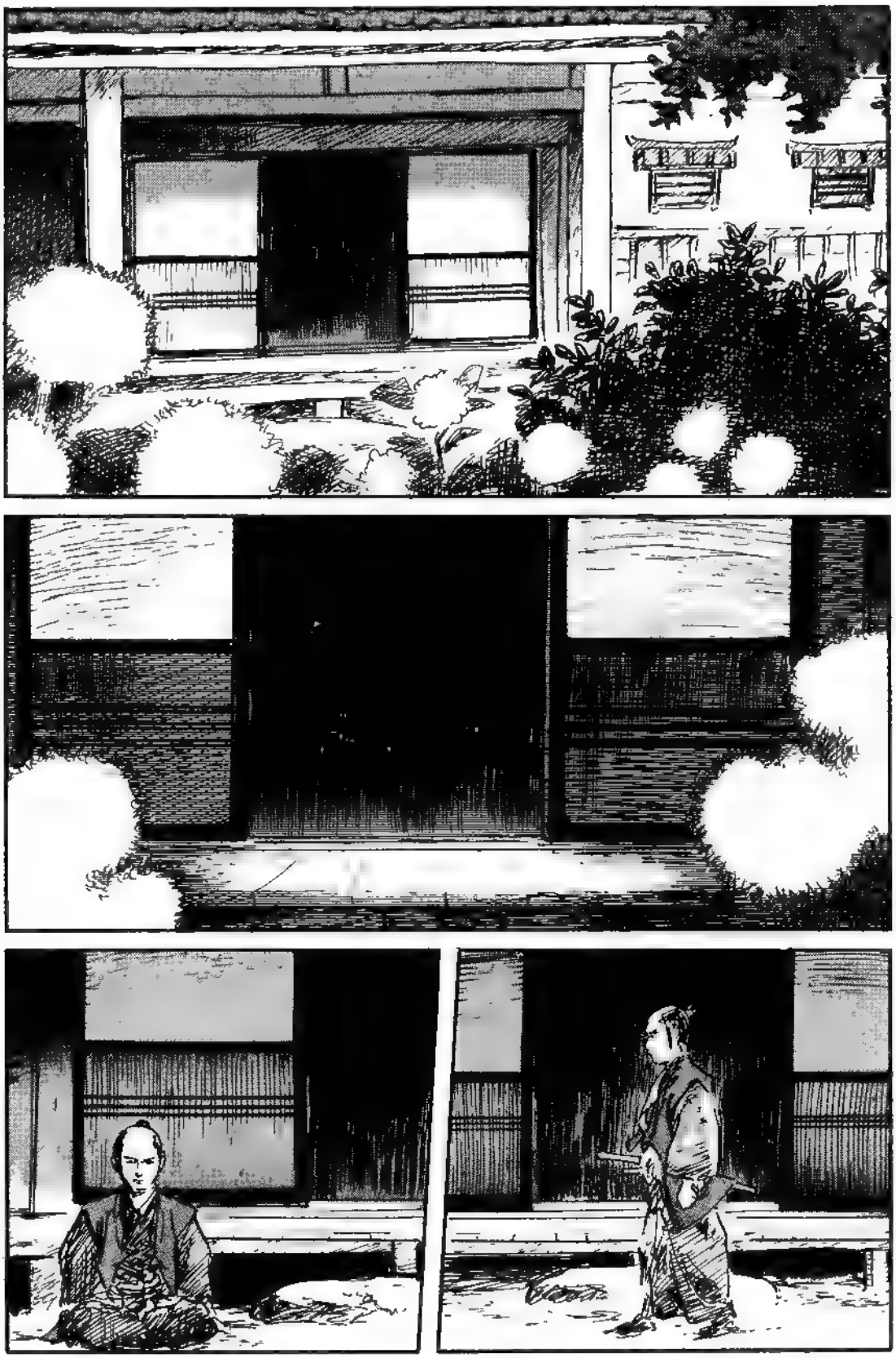
# Chapter On Esha Jōzi

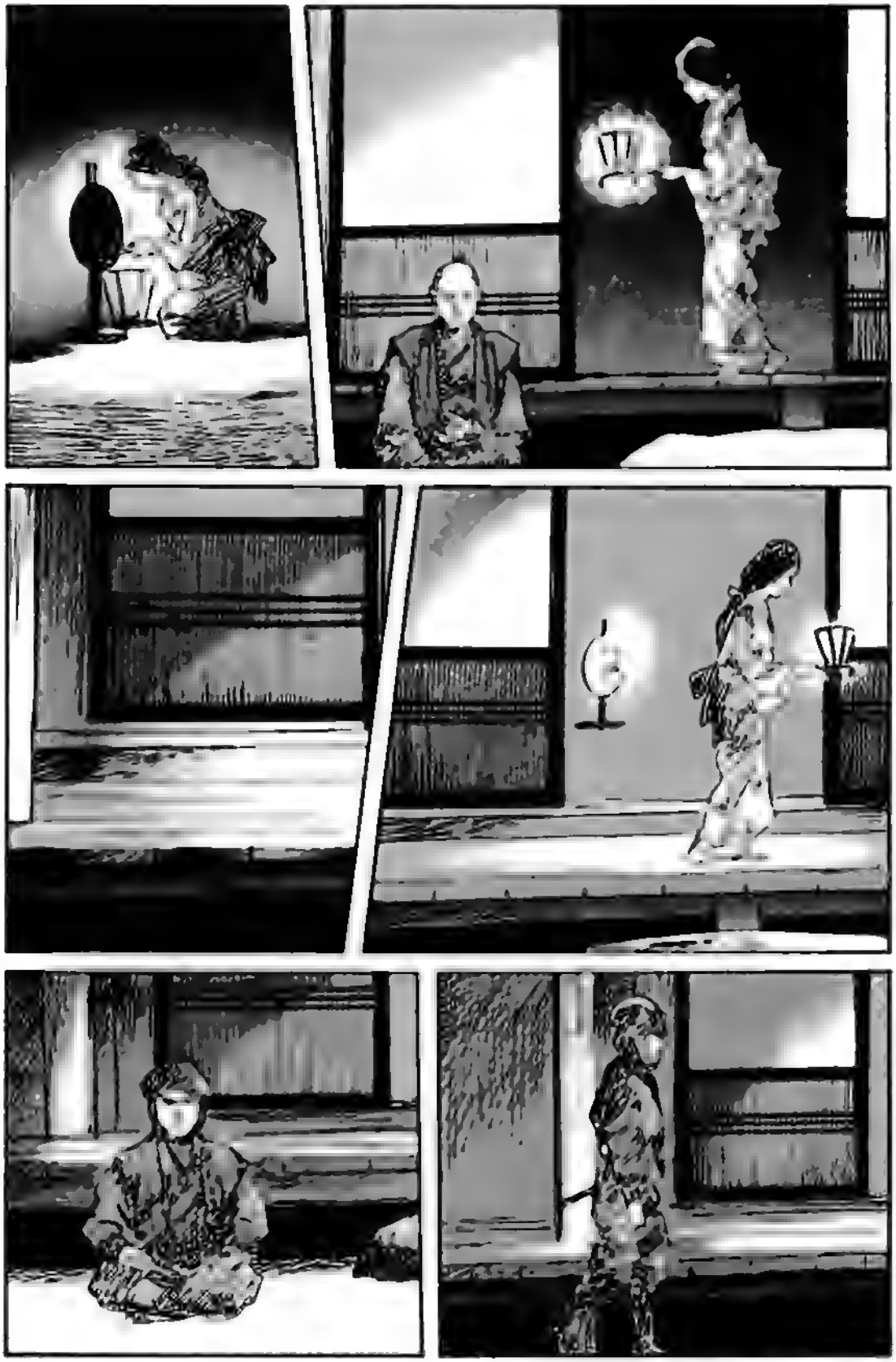
## No. 1: Shinobi with Extending Fists (part 1)

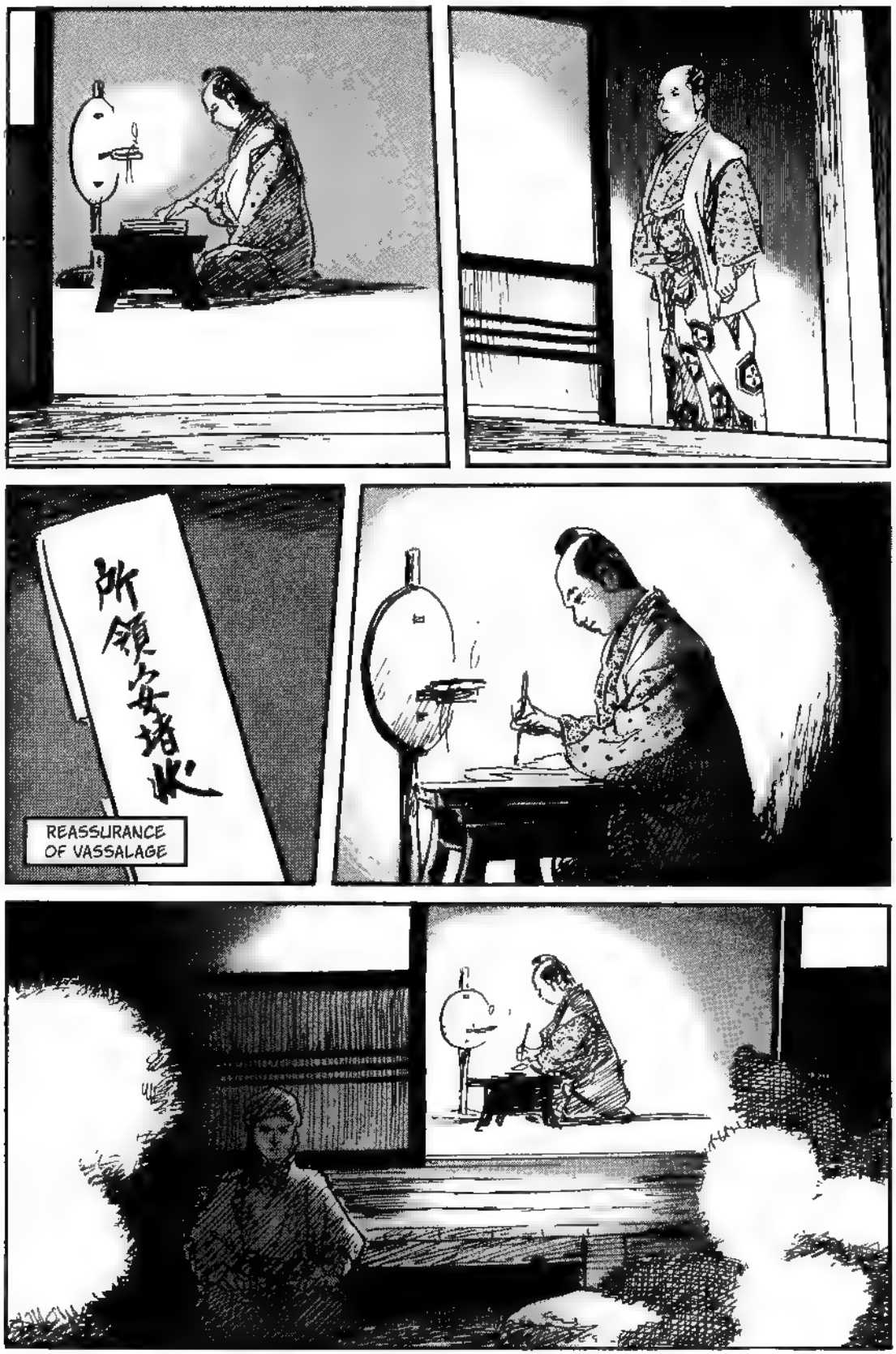


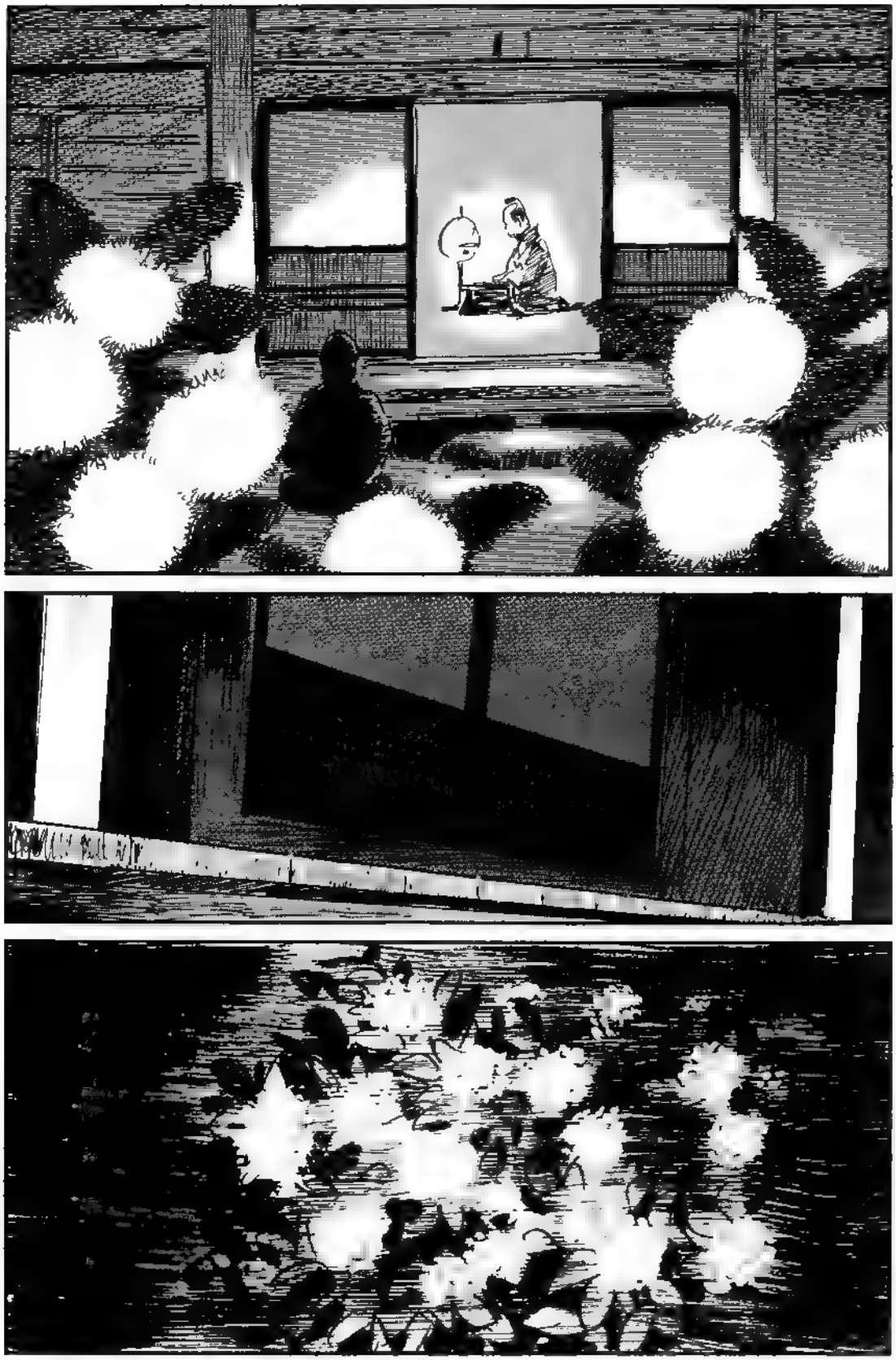

HM?!
USH...

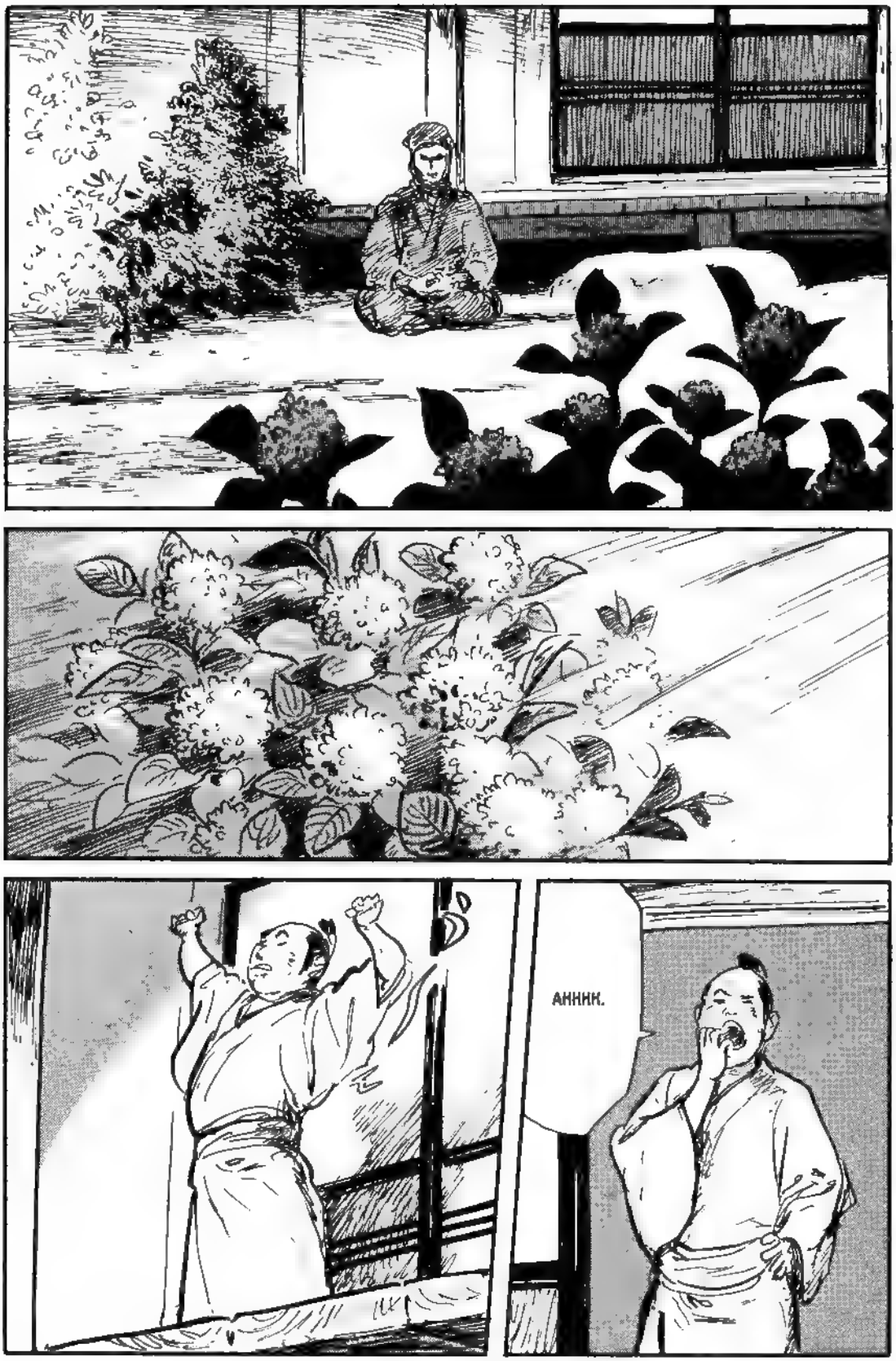




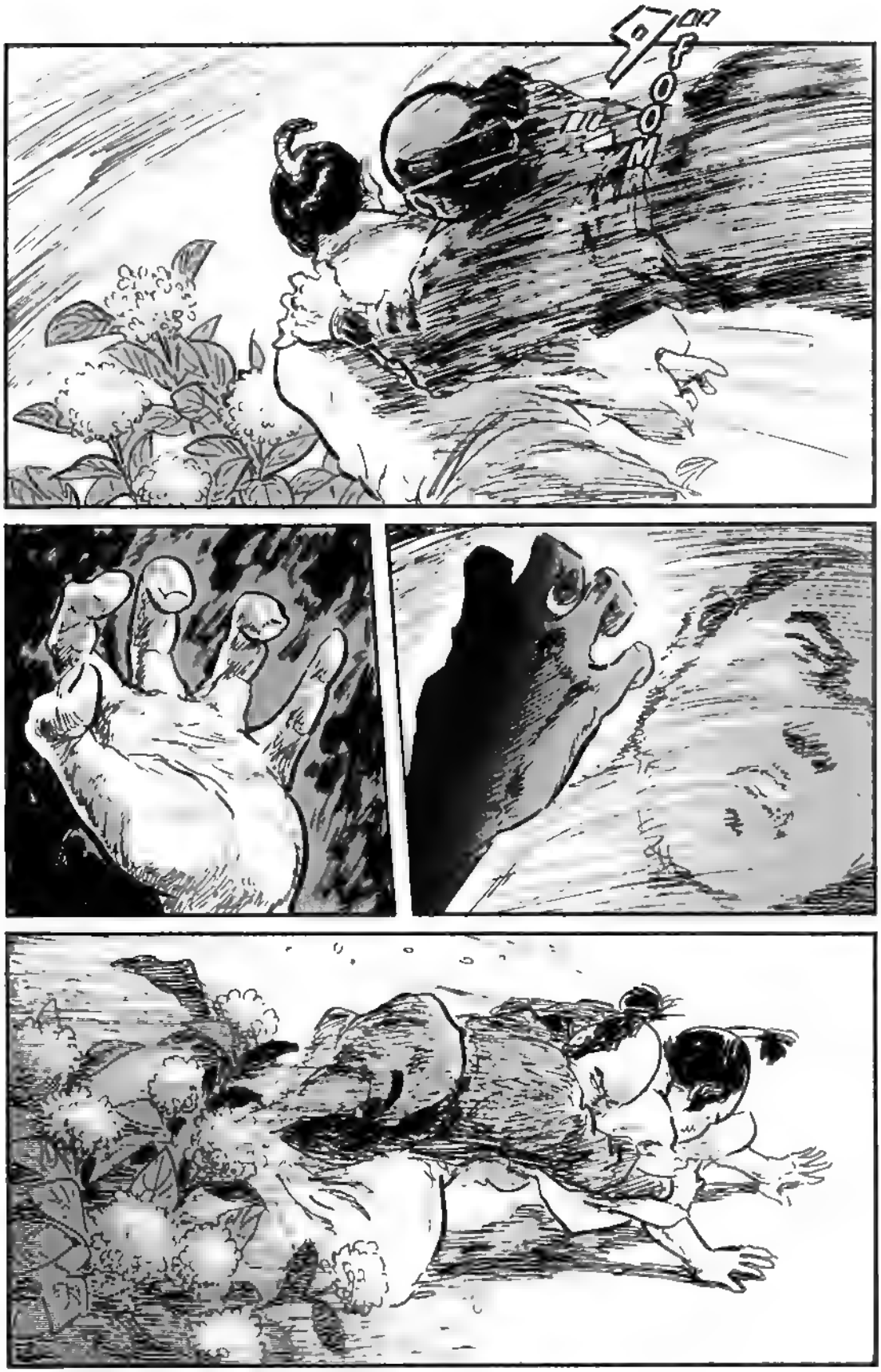



所領安堵状
REASSURANCE OF VASSALAGE




AHHHH.

IT LOOKS LIKE THE WIND HAS STOPPED.
YES.
HO.
WITH NOT A DROP OF RAIN, IT'S GETTING TOO DRY TO BEAR.
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL HYDRANGEA!


KA-
BOOM

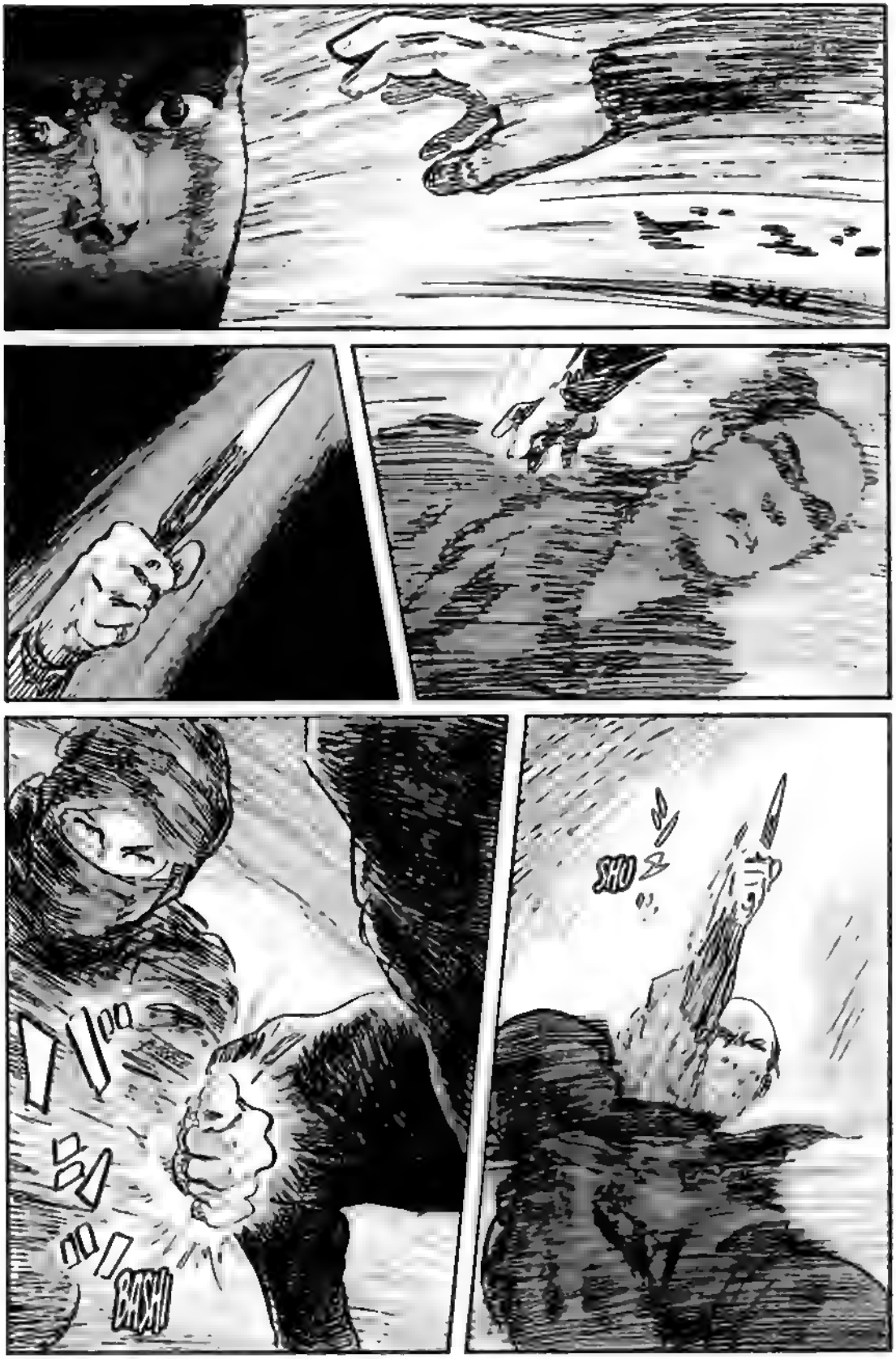
NO WONDER YOU'RE THE BEST OF IGA, HANZŌ.
WHO'S THERE?!
ARE YOU IMAGAWA'S ASSASSIN?
BUT HOW DID YOU SEE ME? I'M KNOWN FOR MY ABILITY TO TRANSFORM MYSELF INTO GRASS AND FLOWERS, SUPPRESSING MY PRESENCE SO WELL THAT NOT EVEN ANIMALS NOTICE ME.
...LET ME ASK YOU ONCE MORE. HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS HERE?
BUT BEFORE WE FIGHT...
IF I LOSE, I WILL CONFESS EVERYTHING. BUT IF I WIN, ALLOW ME TO LEAVE UNHARMED.
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW, FIGHT ME ONE-ON-ONE.

WITH THIS DRY WEATHER, THERE'S NO WAY IT COULD BLOOM.
A HYDRANGEA NEEDS RAIN BEFORE IT BLOSSOMS. A LOT OF RAIN.

READY?

I AM!

NO NEED TO HELP!
HE PROMISED TO CONFESS IF HE LOSES, SO PLEASE LET ME HANDLE THIS.
IF YOU DO, HE MIGHT KILL HIMSELF BY BITING HIS TONGUE AND GOUGING OUT HIS FACE.


SHO
BASH

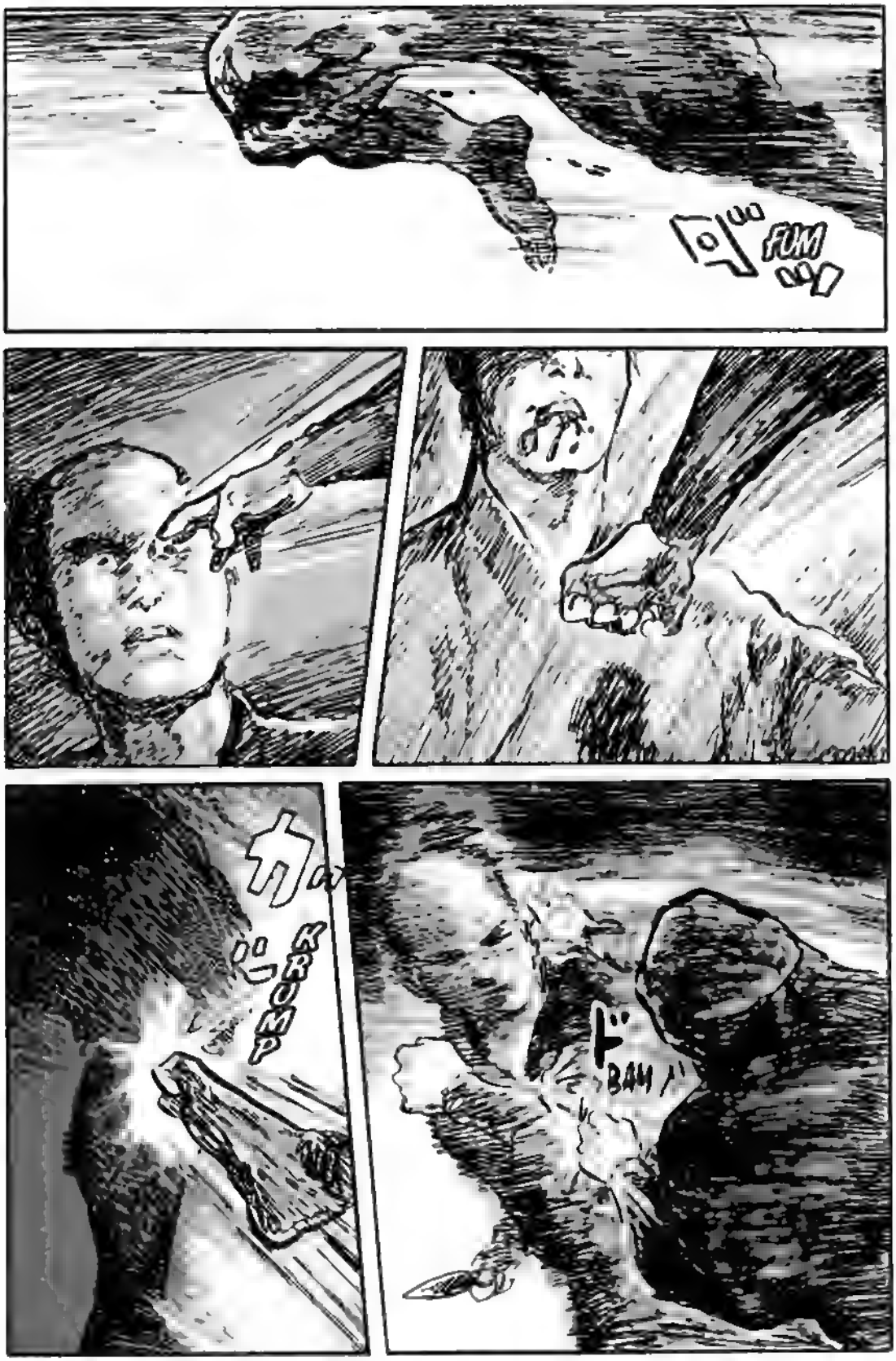
URK!

URR!
WHAM

I AM FINE.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, HANZŌ?!
SHU

"ה
CHUFF

I AM FINE.
HUFF


FUM
BAM!

URG!
UGH..

UGH...

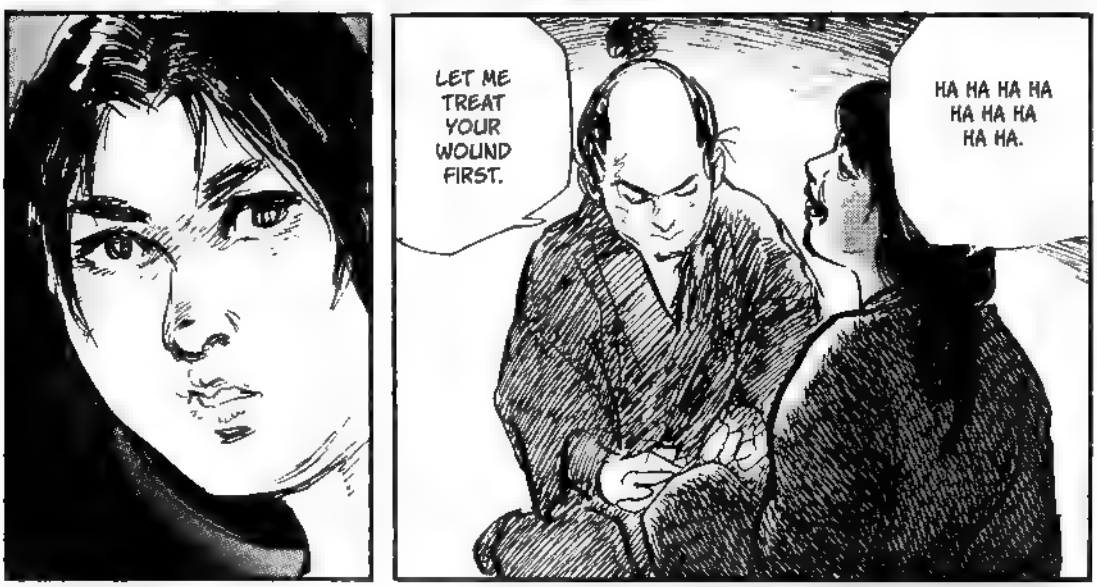
SHU

SLAMM

HM!
YOUR NAME?!
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
I AM KIKKŌ OF IKORO, AN IMAGAWA ASSASSIN.

DURING THE FIGHT, YOU REMAINED GROUNDED, SHIELDING YOUR MASTER.
HA HA HA HA HA. YOU ARE INDEED THE BEST OF IGA, HANZŌ. WHAT AN EXCELLENT MAN!

I LOST.
YOU WOULDN'T THROW *KUNAI* NOR JUMP. SUPPRESSING YOUR OWN SKILLS, YOU PROTECTED YOUR LORD. I PUSHED YOU TO FIGHT BECAUSE I WANTED A CHANCE TO SPRING UPON IEYASU. BUT THERE WAS NONE, WITH YOU REFUSING TO LEAP.




PATH OF THE ASSASSIN, VOLUME 7 / THE END (TO BE CONTINUED)

**mizugumo**
Translates to "water spider."

**Ritsuryo**
The historical law system based on the philosophies of Confucianism and Chinese legalism in Japan. The political system in accord to Ritsuryo is called *"ritsuryo-sei."*

**saihai**
A Japanese war fan used for signaling troops.

**Sakai Tadatsugu**
(1527–1596) One of the most notable officers under Tokugawa Ieyasu. After the year of 1560, when Tadatsugu helped Ieyasu split his ties with the Imagawa, Tadatsugu was given command of the Yoshida castle.

**Saito Dosan**
(1494-1556) The epitome of the *daimyo* that dramatically rose and also fell from power in Sengoku period Japan. He is known as Mamushi of Mino (a type of poisonous snake) for his ruthless tactics.

**Saitō Tatsuoki**
(1548 August 14, 1573) A *daimyo* in Mino province during the Sengoku period. He was a son of Saito Yoshitatsu. Tatsuoki succeeded his father at the age of fourteen. He was, however, an incapable ruler unlike his grandfather and father.

**Saito Yoshitatsu**
(1527-1561) One of the sons of Saito Dosan, who is known as the serpent *daimyo*. Yoshitatsu was the feudal lord of Mino

**sake**
Japanese rice wine.

**seki**
Short for *sekisho*. A border control outpost placed on major roads to maintain the security of Kinai. At the *seki*, every traveler had to undergo strict scrutiny before being allowed to pass through.

**shinobi**
Ninja

**Shirayama**
The Shirayama-hime shrine is the head shrine of about three thousand Shirayama shrines across the nation, and the center of Hakusan worship. "Shirayama" is another way of reading "Hakusan," which means simply "white mountain."

**Sūfu Sessai, Taigen**
(d. 1557) Also known as Taigen Sessai, a Japanese abbot and mountain ascetic. He was the uncle of Imagawa Yoshimoto, and served him as military advisor and as commander of Imagawa's forces, despite his lack of any formal battle training or experience.

**Takeda Katsuyori**
(1546–1582) The son of Takeda Shingen and father of Takeda Nobukatsu and Takeda Katsuchika.

**Tenbun**
*Tenbun* (or *Temmon* or *Tembun*) was a Japanese era after Kyōroku and before Kōji and spanned from 1532 to 1555. The reigning emperor was Go-Nara.

**Tokugawa**
*Toku* (virtue/merit/grace/good) + *gawa* (kawa =river).

**Honda Shigetsugu**
(1529-1596) The son of Honda Shigemasa. Shigetsugu was also known as Honda Sakuzaemon. Shigetsugu became a greatly trusted retainer under Tokugawa Ieyasu, serving him during many campaigns such as the battle of Terabe during the year 1599, along with the battle of Mikatagahara.

**Igamono**
"Men of Iga."

**ikko-ikki**
The Japanese *ikko-ikki*, literally "single-minded leagues," were mobs of peasant farmers and low-status samurai, who rose up against samurai rule in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They followed the beliefs of the Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, which taught that all believers are equally saved by Amida Buddha's grace.

**Inabayama**
*Inaba* + *yama* = mountain. It is the "mountain castle of Inaba," and still stands today, though much repaired.

**jisha**
Temples & shrines.

**jugoige**
Junior fifth ranks, a lower grade retainer

**kekkai**
A term used in Buddhism. Here it appears to mean a barrier or field of some sort that cloaks or protects the area

**Kinai**
A historical region of Japan. Its name literally means "inside the capital." It consisted of the following five provinces: Yamato, Yamashiro, Kawachi, Settsu, and Izumi. Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe also belonged to Kinai.

**Kobunsho**
Old *bunsho*.

**Kōriki Kiyonaga**
(1530 – March 12, 1608) A daimyo in the Azuchi-Momoyama period and Edo period. He was a retainer of the Tokugawa clan. His father was Koriki Yasunaga.

**kunai**
A kunai is an ancient kind of trowel, originated during the Tensho era in Japan. Contrary to popular belief, they were not designed as throwing weapons, though they can definitely be thrown and cause damage. Ninjutsu is very versatile in the way it employs weapons and non-weapons. A ninja could work as a gardener during the day and use a kunai without raising suspicion.

**Kunitomo blacksmith**
During the Sengoku Jidai, or warring states period, of the sixteenth century, the city of Kunitomo, later renamed Nagahama, was known for its gun industry. Back then, the city produced and supplied guns to Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, amongst others.

**measurement**
1 *kan* = 8.27 lb,
200 *kan* = 1,653.47 lb.
6 *monme* = 0.79 oz.

**Mikawa-no-kami**
A title that signifies protector/keeper of Mikawa.

**Minamoto Yoritomo**
(1148–1199) Japanese warrior and dictator, founder of the Kamakura shogunate.

**Mino**
Mino is an old province of Japan, which today composes nearly the southern part of Gifu prefecture.

# GLOSSARY

**bugyō**
A high-ranking samurai official. A commissioner.

**bunsho**
Record, archive, document

**daibō**
Consists of two kanji characters: *dai* + *bō*. "*Dai*" translates to "big," and "*bō*" is "a priest's lodge, a monk's living house attached to a Buddhist temple, a cell." This could be translated to "reassurance of spiritual position."

**Echigo**
Echigo was a province in north-central Japan ruled by Uesugi Kenshin and his heirs during the Sengoku period; later it became a fief of Ieyasu's Matsudaira relatives.

**Eiroku**
Year 3 = 1560 A.D., year 7 = 1564 A.D., et al.

**gekokujō**
A phenomenon of social meritocracy, in which capable subordinates rejected the status quo and forcefully overthrew an emaciated aristocracy. *Gekokujō*, literally means "the underling conquers the overlord."

**Genpei War**
(1180-1185) A war of ancient Japan, fought between the Taira and Minamoto clans. The Genpei War resulted in the fall of the Taira clan and establishment of Minamoto Yoritomo as shogun of Japan in 1192. The name "Genpei" comes from Genji and Heike (or Heishi), alternate readings of the kanji characters "Minamoto" and "Taira" respectively.

**gūji**
The chief priest of a Shinto shrine.

**hibachi**
A portable charcoal-burning brazier with a grill, used chiefly for cooking.

**hii-sama**
A linguistic corruption of *hime sama* (princess-sama).

**Hiraiwa Chikayoshi**
(1542-1611) A trusted retainer under Tokugawa Ieyasu. It is known that Chikayoshi was a tutor to the eldest son of Ieyasu, Matsuraida Nobuyasu.

**honorifics**
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
*dono* – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
*san* – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
*sama* – used for superiors
*sensei* – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

**Huainanzi**
*Huainanzi* (literally "the masters/philosophers of Huainan") is a Chinese philosophical classic from the Han dynasty that blends Daoist, Confucianist, and Legalist concepts, including theories such as yin-yang and the five phases. It was written under the patronage of Liu An, king of Huainan, a legendarily prodigious author.

# KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

# GOSEKI KOJIMA

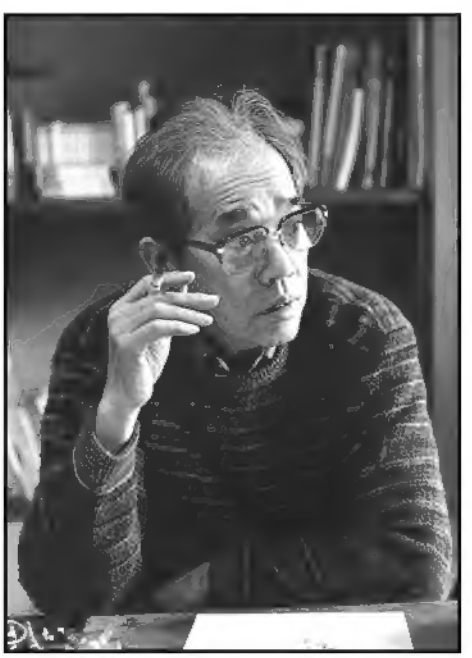
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



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Published by Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
in association with Soeisha Inc.

Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie OR 97222
www.darkhorse.com

First edition: September 2007
ISBN-10: 1-59307-508-1 ISBN-13: 978-1-59307-508-8

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Canada

**Path of the Assassin Vol. 7: Center of the World**
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Although Sakai Tadahisa is Ieyasu's vassal, he masterminds the *ikkō-ikki* against Ieyasu in Mikawa. Hanzō learns of the intrigue between Tadahisa and Ujizane, and obtains a secret letter that proves their connection. Using the letter, Ieyasu finally quells the uprising, which is often spoken of as the greatest difficulty of his life. It is after things settle down that Hideyoshi pays a visit to Ieyasu and Hanzō.

In this fictional telling of to-be-shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu's early life, Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima weave an intriguing, sexy, and charming story of young lives passing into very unusual adulthoods—if they can live that long!

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